

Jersey Beat

ultra vivid scene

Crocodile Shop

Stetz

Uncle Bob
Touched Me

Bad Karma

Reviews

Sonic Youth

Feelies

Stripminers

Books & Video

#36 WINTER/1989

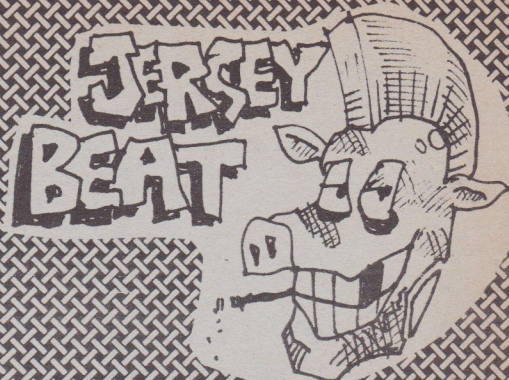
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ultra vivid scene



Jim Testa Chevrolet - A subsidiary of Jersey Beat Inc.

Photo: Sean Condon



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Welcome to Issue #36 of Jersey Beat, a kinder, gentler fanzine for the new era. Yeah, well, we'll just see how that works out. Personally, I'm glad to be rid of both 1988 and the Reagan era. Things will change with a new president, they almost always do. 1964 saw Johnson's presidency begin and the Beatles come to America; 1976 you've probably read about (if you don't actually remember it...do the names Johnny Rotten and Joey Ramone ring a bell?); even 1980 saw the beginnings of hardcore, the end of Punk Rock and the dawning of the age of the Indie Underground. 1988 felt like the end of a cycle, the last stale, fetid breath of a stagnant, moribund culture. Manufactured teen-queen divas like Tiffany and Kylie Minogue rocketed up the pop charts (along with disposable readymades like Rick Astley, Bon Jovi, and Sting) while the underground wallowed in a false nostalgia for the early 1970's, a decade that really was never as much fun as all the Stooges, Zeppelin, and Aerosmith imitators around today would have you believe. It was a year when rock really didn't seem to matter; when the two biggest media celebrities from the world of rock (if you judge celebrity by counting tabloid headlines) were John Lennon (courtesy of Albert Goldman's hateful book) and Elvis. And even we cool indie pigfucker futurists found little that was really new to celebrate; but hey, how about those two "new" Mission of Burma lps, huh? Or that live Sex Pistols album? Well...you get the point.

Happy new year everybody. To welcome the new era, Jersey Beat hereby offers a lifetime subscription and a free copy of any of our compilation cassettes to the first bona fide band to come along that uses either Bush or Quayle in its name. As for Naked Raygun, Reagan Youth, and all those bands with songs titled "Reagan Sucks," you'll just have to wait around for the '80's Revival.

- Jim Testa
January, 1989

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Nothing in 1988 blew me away quite as convincingly or as unexpectedly as Ultra Vivid Scene, the first album by New York's Kurt Ralske. Kurt released first a 3-song 12" and then an lp on England's 4AD label that proved to be the debut finds of the year. Not only were the records full of wonderfully bubbly pop melodies and layers of ticklish guitar effects and percussion, but Kurt created the music entirely by himself - providing all the vocals, playing all the instruments, even programming the drum machine. Fortunately, Kurt is no stranger to Jersey Beat, having been around the NJ/NY scene for quite a while; so in between bites of Chinese squid, shrimp, and chicken on a recent Saturday night, Bruce Gallanter and I queried him about some of the finer points of nascent superstardom.

If you'd only heard his album and read his press clippings, you'd never pick him out of a crowd. Kurt couldn't be more unprepossessing; a runty baby-faced 24-year old with a shock of wild blond hair spilling across both sides of his face. It's all too easy to take his diminutive stature and quiet nature to heart and overlook the enormous talent inside. Although he's been interviewed to death already by the British music press, Kurt found the time to talk with us about songs, bands, and girls on drugs, among other things. Dig it.

- Jim Testa

Jim: Y'know, when I first got the 12," I didn't even know it was your record. I was just amazed there was finally a record out on 4AD that I liked. Then Bruce told me you were Ultra Vivid Scene and I said, 'No, this is some Japanese band...' [There are Japanese graphics, including Japanese baseball players, adorning the record jacket.]

Kurt: [laughing] The funny thing is that some company licensed the record in Japan, and that guy is on the album jacket too, and they had to take him off. He's still around. I mean, people in Japan know who he is. It'd be like putting a picture of Joe DiMaggio on your record jacket.

Jim: And you actually got this deal just by putting a demo in the mail?

Kurt: Yeah, I had these 16 track demos and I sent them out, and Ivo (head of 4AD) wrote a letter back, and we met a couple of times.

Jim: Were the songs on the demo used on the record?

Kurt: Some of them. The song "Memory #1," that's actually a demo.

Bruce: So, Kurt, how's your mother doing?

Kurt: She's okay.

Bruce: How does she feel about what's happening?

Kurt: Well, she doesn't really understand. I've tried to explain it but she just doesn't get it really. I played her the record and she liked it, but she's still worried about some of the lyrics.

Jim: Okay, so you sent Ivo this tape. So then how did you wind up doing it in Ben [Navee]'s apartment? [See sidebar for full story.]

Kurt: Okay...originally, I was living in London, and it was originally the idea that I would work with a producer who's done some other stuff for 4AD. So I met up with this guy and tried to figure out how we'd work it out, and it just didn't work out at all. So I approached Ivo with the idea of letting me do it on my own. So he said, why don't you go and give it a try, and we'll see how it goes. So I went and did another demo, sort of, and he said, yeah, sounds great, keep going.

Jim: Well, you go to a record label and say, I could make this for you for free in my friend's apartment, or you could pay for a studio...

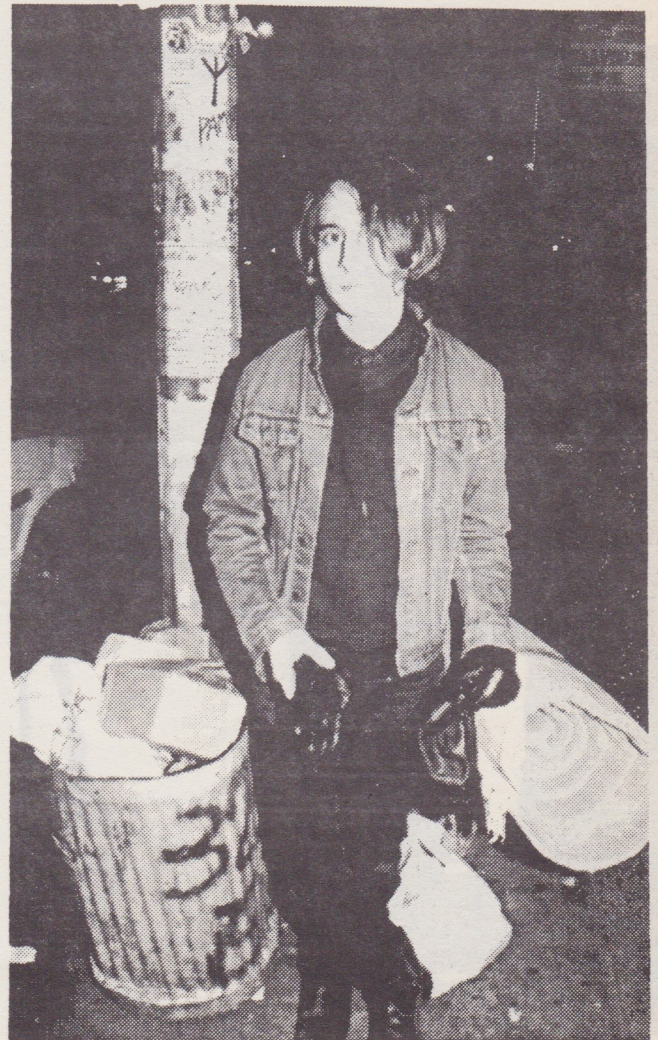
Bruce: But it was really that you wanted to make it on your own, right?

A Behind-The-Scenes Look at

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Kurt: Well, it was partially that, but the recording budget was already set. What they did was, they decided what the recording budget was going to be, and whatever I didn't spend would be left over for me to live on.

Jim: Which was probably most of it.

Kurt: Well...yeah.

Jim: At what point did it officially become known as Ultra Vivid Scene? Or was that always your name for it?

Kurt: That was always my name for it.

Jim: Did the name predate the song "She Screamed?" Because the phrase "it's an ultra vivid scene" is in that lyric, I noticed.

Kurt: I think there was a "She Screamed" before there was an Ultra Vivid Scene, yeah.



Ultra Vivid Scene

'I want to make the

kind of record

you play when you're

getting ready to go out.

Or cleaning the house.'

Bruce: Were all the songs on the record written within the last year?

Kurt: No, no. "She Screamed" was a particularly old one, it was from about 3 years ago.

Bruce: How long have you actually been working on tunes?

Kurt: Three years or more. I was writing some other kinds of songs, but not really pop songs before that.

Bruce: So you were writing songs for yourself when you were in Crash, writing pop stuff?

Kurt: Yes.

Bruce: You didn't get any writing credits on the Crash stuff?

Kurt: I did get a co-writing credit on one song. But I did actually help write stuff.

Bruce: What about King of Culture?

Kurt: That was weird. Everybody would write their own parts. One song they made me play violin, which was weird because I didn't know how to play it.

Jim: So, getting back to Ultra Vivid Scene, you're putting a band together now. Will the songs sound different live than they do on the record?

Kurt: Oh yeah, they're going to be a lot more extroverted, and a lot more faster & louder. Because the record really is pretty lethargic, it just kinda sits there. It's cool, that way, but...

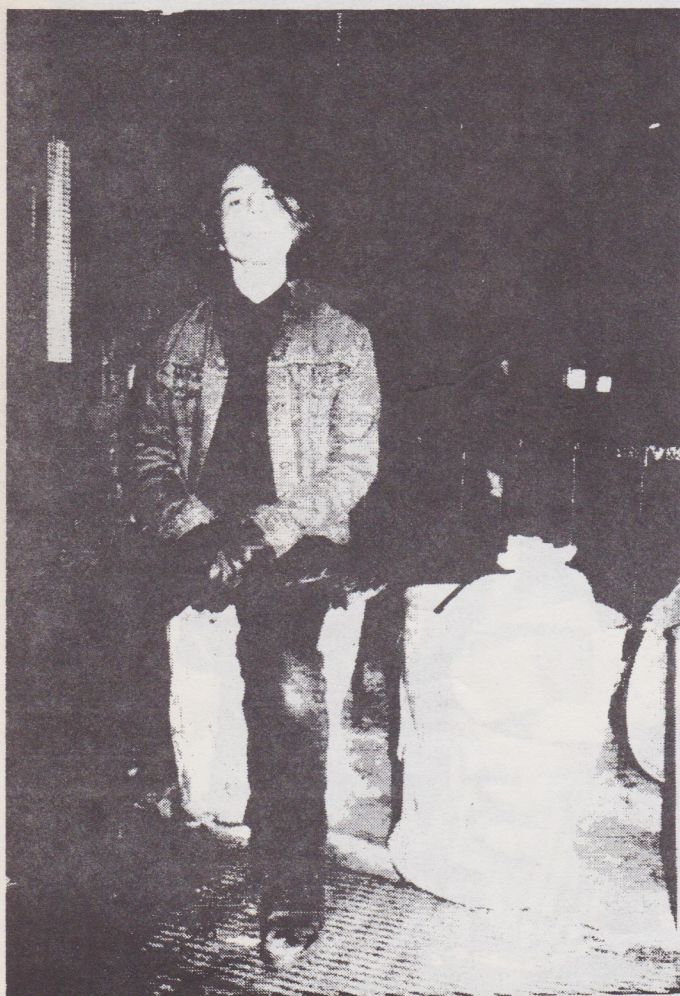
Bruce: ...but it wouldn't sound good live.

Kurt: Yeah, it would sound too boring. The band's gonna be much more energetic.

Bruce: What about your singing? You didn't sing much with Dissipated Face, and you didn't sing with those other groups very much. This is just more recent that you've been doing that?

Jim: Are you singing with a British accent because you had been living in England?

Kurt: Well, I had been living in England for two years, and hanging out with a lot of English people, so... But I wasn't thinking about it.



Jim: Well, if you didn't know it was an American singing, you wouldn't think it was an American singing.

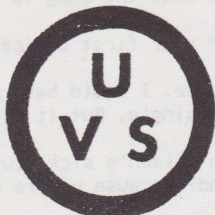
Kurt: I don't know. It could be.

Jim: Where did the pop framework of Ultra Vivid Scene come from? Because I've never really associated you with pop songs before.

Kurt: Well, from all those other bands. And also it was the sort of stuff I started listening to. I was really into 60's stuff, and classic pop songs.

Jim: How about contemporary stuff?

Kurt: I like a lot of rap music.



Jim: Yeah, but that doesn't seem to be an influence in Ultra Vivid Scene.

Kurt: (slyly) Well, not yet.

Bruce: I think you've been moving closer to pop through the years. That King of Culture stuff, I thought, was close to pop music.

Kurt: Yeah, art-school pop music.

Jim: Has anyone made comparisons to Robyn Hitchcock?

Kurt: Yeah, in England a lot. Although actually they compare me to Syd Barrett, and I guess Syd Barrett is where Robyn Hitchcock got all that stuff from.

Jim: So, who's in the band so far?

Kurt: This guy named Byron Guthrie on drums, he used to be in Crash. And a girl named Kristin Kramer on bass. I still don't know who's going to play guitar.

Bruce: You want another guitar player so you can concentrate more on singing?

Kurt: Yeah.

Jim: This band is going to be Lets Active when you get through.

Kurt: (grinning) Yeah, that'd be fun.

Jim: And when you get it all together, I assume you'll be going to England. I assume you're better known there already than you are here.

Kurt: Well, definitely go to England. But the record is doing very well here on college radio. I actually did some gigs in England before I left there.

Jim: As Ultra Vivid Scene?

Kurt: That's right.

Bruce: This was before you had the contract?

Kurt: Right. But then my drummer decided she didn't want to be in the band anymore, and I couldn't find anyone else, so I kind of gave it up...The drummer I was playing with, she was the original drummer in Loop.

[Interesting but unrelated conversation about Loop and drug use among British musicians follows.]

Jim: So what is the British music press really like? Were you over there when you did those interviews, or what?

Kurt: Some I did when I was over there, and some I did by phone. They really do have this pattern where they'll build you up and you're the greatest, and then after six months they decide you're shit and they rip you to shreds.

Bruce: There was something about that article in Melody Maker where you told me the guy put words in your mouth?

Kurt: Oh yeah. But the worst part was that I said a lot of stuff that was really cool & funny, but he didn't print any of that, he just printed all the intellectual garbage. I mean, what can you do? Like he'd say to me, 'Have you heard of Roland Barthes' theory of such-and-such and so-and-so,' and I'd say, 'yeah, I think so,' and then everything he said turns up in the article in quotation marks like I said it.

Jim: So what was your reaction when all those articles came out calling you a genius?

Kurt: I didn't see that. One said, 'How can you tell when you've heard a brilliant album?' But brilliant in England means good, it doesn't mean like Albert Einstein. People say, like, I'm going out for some pizza -- oh, brilliant.

Bruce: You seem to be able to deal with the press.

Jim: It doesn't seem to have gone to your head. Your hair, maybe...

Kurt: Yeah, my hair.

Bruce: But you are very happy with the way the record turned out, I know that.

Kurt: Yeah. I mean, it's not like it's going to sell ten million copies, and there are people who don't like it...I wasn't trying to make a record that everyone was going to like. On this record, I wasn't thinking at all about what other people would think. I was just thinking I was going to go for my own world and do something really private.

Bruce: I think that's what's so good about it.

Kurt: Yeah, maybe. But I don't think I'm going to make any more records like this.

Bruce: Because you want more people to like it?



Kurt: Yeah, but also because it's easier to listen to. If I bought that record, I would have a hard time listening to it...like a Syd Barrett record, you don't put it on for fun. There's just too much going on for that...I want to make a record that you put on when you're getting ready to go out, or you're cleaning up your house or something.

Jim: Like an R.E.M. record.

Kurt: Right.

Jim: Working with other people in a band will make it a less private sort of record next time anyway, won't it?

Kurt: Right. That's definitely where I want to go. I want it to really sound like a band.

Jim: You've never actually been in a band where you had to be the songwriter, right?

Kurt: True, but I've been in tons of bands, so I know how bands work. The way it will work will depend on how it works out. If the band works together really well, learns how to play together, I would just come in with the chords and say everybody write their own part. It may have to work out where I teach people their parts and then they can change them to suit themselves. I do want people who do their own thing and I do want it to be like a real band, but there'll always be this problem of, like, Kurt did the first record on his own so he could do all this himself...but I do want the whole band to get their hand in.

[Conversation changes to songwriting and Kurt's interest in country music. The Ultra Vivid Scene EP includes "Walking After Midnight," an old Tin Pan Alley tune that Kurt heard on a Patsy Cline record.]

Bruce: I think Kurt realizes the song is the most important thing of all.

Kurt: Right. Like when I was first working on it, I had the songs first, just acoustic guitar and melody, and I realized that I could add anything else, and treat it any different kind of way, and the song would still be the song. And if you have a great song, you can do almost anything to it and still have the same basic effect, but if you have a great song, it gives you more room to play around with it.

Bruce: Did you record a lot more songs that didn't make it onto the record? Because the album's 14 songs. You don't see that much.

**'I was really trying
to recreate the first
Velvet Underground
album.'**

Kurt: Yeah, it's a really long album too. But one of the other good things about the way I did the record was, I wasn't worried about time. When I was doing the songs, I knew pretty much which ones I was going to do...I started with like 30 songs, and I picked 18 or 16 of them. And I knew which ones I was going to do, but a few of them I did a few different versions, just to hear what they'd sound like in different settings. Like I'd do them faster or slower, or play them with different instruments. Because I was also learning what to do as I went along, I had never produced a record before, so I wanted to try a lot of different things out.

Jim: Is the version of "She Screamed" on the EP the same as on the album?

Kurt: No, it's different. I think the version on the EP is better, actually. It's sloppier but I think it's better.

Jim: You gonna do a video?

Kurt: Actually, there's a British tv program called SNUB. The American version is different actually. But the people who do the British version came over about a month ago and filmed a rehearsal of the group, we had a guitarist sitting in and they filmed the whole thing. And the guy who did the Jesus & Mary Chain videos, his name is Pinko, he did a video of the song "Mercy Seat." So they're going to show it in England and then send it over and try and get it on 120 Minutes here or something.

Jim: Doesn't the phrase "mercy seat" mean something?

Kurt: It does but I'm not sure what it is. I know Gordon Gano had that band Mercy Seat. Although I wrote my song months and months before Nick Cave released his song "Mercy Seat."

Jim: You write some pretty weird lyrics. Do you always know what they mean?

Kurt: Some I do, and some I actually don't, I don't have any idea what they're about. "She Screamed" actually is about something, I'll tell you what that's about. I was in a bar a couple of years ago and this girl came in, and we were talking, she started drinking, and she started to get just really giddy and smiling a lot. And what had happened was she had just done Ecstasy before she came into the bar, and talking to her she just got more & more out of control and went nuts...

Jim: ...and screamed.

Kurt: Right. And that's what the song is about.

Jim: Was "She Screamed" your first choice for the single?

Kurt: It was 4AD's choice. I would have preferred "Mercy Seat," actually, as the single. But it did okay, I guess.

Jim: Do you like Brian Wilson's sick stuff, when he was totally off the deep end? Because you're stuff reminds me of that a little.

Kurt: Oh, that stuff is great, it's fucking great. No one's ever said that before. People always tell me, 'oh, you like the Stranglers.'

Bruce: People tell me it sounds like The Only Ones a lot.

Kurt: Yeah, I've heard that a lot, and I've never listened to them. In England a few people I know said I sounded like Peter Parrott and Syd Barrett. What I was really trying to do was recreate the first Velvet Underground album. Don't tell anybody, but I really was. It's a classic. It's got so much mood and atmosphere. And the best thing is that nothing fucking happens on that record. All the songs are just completely static, they start at one level of intensity and just stay there. But it works. It gets more & more intense just because nothing happens. Like, "I'm Waiting For My Man" is just like [he goes "da da da da," playing air keyboards with his hands to illustrate], the same, all the way through for 7 minutes. "Venus In Furs" is the same for, what, 5 minutes. It's just a fucking classic.

Ultra Vivid

by Bruce Gallanter

Currently a fave on the college radio charts as well as with the finicky UK press is an lp by Ultra Vivid Scene. Besides being on my Top 10 of '88, even sourpuss/critic G.Cosloy gave it a good review. Not too bad considering it's entirely a solo project, written, performed, and produced in a small studio apartment on the Lower East Side by a 24-year old pop wizard named Kurt Ralske. And since the British press has yet to discover the true diversity of Kurt's background, aside from his work in the NY/London-based Crash, it's time to set the record straight.

Altho a decade apart in age, Kurt & I have been good friends for about 7 years. In the fall of '81, we met at a Fred Frith concert in NYC. A senior in high school at the time, he had just taken up the guitar after discarding the trumpet and taking a jazz studies course at the Berkeley School of Music in Boston that previous summer. The ever-inquisitive, sonically soul-searching lad was checking out Mr. Frith to see how far the limits of guitar playing could be stretched. I soon invited him to a bunch of early bohemian jams in Linden, NJ. Except for the Mopeds, most of the players at these jams at lengthy jazz backgrounds. Hence, Kurt did not solo much, but he did learn how to control feedback, often creating a weird background drone for the others to solo on top of. He absorbed ideas at a quick rate.

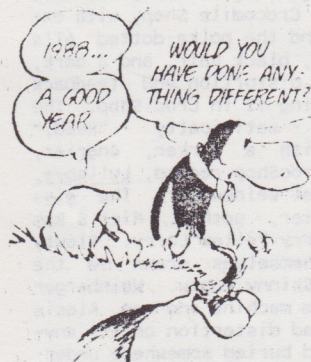
TOM ANGELLI

Bad Religion - Suffer
Circle Jerks - VI
Dickies - Killer Klowns EP
Doughboys - Whatever
Fugazi - EP
Government Issue - Crash
Ignition - Machination
Naked Raygun - Jettison
Rollins Band - Lifetime
Soul Side - Trigger

That Was The Year That Was

Scum Rock

Jersey Beat's
Top 10 Records of 1988



Sonic Youth - Daydream Nation
Naked Raygun - Jettison
Feelies - Only Life
Doughboys - Whatever
Ultra Vivid Scene - LP
Rollins Band - Lifetime
Dinosaur Jr. - Bug
Big Dipper - Craps
Patti Smith - Dream Of Life
Butthole Surfers - Hairway To Steven

Bruce Gallanter

1. Butthole Surfers - Hairway To Steven
2. Little Feat - Let It Roll
3. Bob Dylan - Down In The Groove
4. Tiny Lights - Hazel's Wreath
5. Wild Seeds - Mud, Lies & Shame
6. Dream Syndicate - Ghost Stories
7. Ultra Vivid Scene - LP
8. Neville Brothers - Live At Tipitina's
9. Prince - Love Sexy
10. Talking Heads - Naked

COLD-IRON

Best LP's/Live Bands

1. Sonic Youth - Daydream Nation
"always a great show...and no, I didn't discover 'em this year."
2. Stain - Skinheads Poke Goats
"the new Pistols"
3. Butthole Surfers - Hairway To Steven
"hypnotic show - flipped out permanently"
4. Danzig - Danzig
"cool sound, he still thinks he's god... or satan...I think he's Frankinberry"
5. Doughboys - Whatever
"awesome...should be ahead of Danzig"
6. Pixies - Surfer Rosa
"NICE tits"
7. Crass - All
"back in print & worth gettin agin"
8. The Rollins Band - Lifetime
"same old shorts, new band"
9. Das Damen - Triskaidekaphobe
"and I haven't even seem 'em live"
10. Inferno - Hibakusha

JOHN LISA

1. Tie: Bad Religion - Suffer
Prong - Force Fed
2. Government Issue - Crash
3. Soulside - Trigger
4. Reverb Motherfuckers - Route 666
5. Bullet LaVolta - EP
6. Swallow - 7"
7. Mud Honey - "Touch Me I'm Sick" 7"
8. Voi Vod - Dimension Hatross
9. Hard Ons - Dick Cheese
10. The Fluid - Clear Black Paper

Worst Band: Rapeman
Biggest Ripoff: ShimmyDisc
Biggest Trend: Guns 'N Roses wannabees!



Scene Report

Kurt grew up in Bellmore/Merrick, Long Island, and soon put together his first band, Dissipated Face, which included the talents of Steve "Extreme" Popkin on drums and Ben "Face" Munvees on bass & vocals. One of their first gigs was at my Linden house, and did they ever blow minds & eardrums!!! They were the most musically ambitious band I ever managed, playing anywhere! They were influenced by many types of music at once - prog rock, reggae, blues, punk, hard rock, and noise. They played at more of my Noise Fests than any other band, and even opened for the Meat Puppets, Shockabilly, and the Anti-Nowhere League.

More so than the other members, Kurt's playing continued to grow, as he became a surprisingly strong improvisationalist, often getting both scary and totally unique sounds from his guitar. He became a true master of feedback & sustain. Yet this wasn't enough. In his spare time, he would work on solo projects for guitars & tape recorder, periodically giving me cassettes of those fascinating pieces. I remember playing some of them for Regressive Aid and Fred Frith; we were all impressed.

Kurt eventually moved to NYC and lived with daredevil sax/guitar improviser Steve Buchanan. They pulled off a handful of fairly cosmic duo gigs. Dissipated Face became more of an occasional hobby; yet even as

late as last Spring, the Face played a gig at the Knitting Factory, still as challenging as ever. But will it be their last? Who knows?

During 1984-1985, Kurt became more interested in song form and pop music. He helped a band called 3 Teens Kill 4 and joined NYC's King Of Culture. KoC had released a fine 7" prior to Kurt, and subsequently recorded a cool lp which, alas, was never released. Kurt was playing bass as well as guitar from this point onward. The next year, Kurt played with two other related New York City bands who found fame in the U.K. He played mostly bass in Nothing But Happiness (who released a 7" and an lp on Justine) and second lead guitar (!!!) in Crash (a 7", a 12", and an lp, same label). Crash moved to England and did fairly well, since their sound was similar to the feedback-drenched pop unit Jesus & Mary Chain.

Kurt squatted in London during most of '87, becoming friends with members of J&M Chain, as well as Britain's other feedback giants, The Loop. He parted ways with Crash, due to personality differences and the band's drug problems, and worked on his own songs. A solo demo tape he sent to Ivo of 4AD got him the record deal he desired, a chance to record his own songs all by himself.

He returned to NYC and during the summer of '88 recorded the first Ultra Vivid Scene release at Ben Munvees' studio/apartment, playing all the instruments and doing all the vocals himself, abetted by a drum machine.

The Techno-Pop Sonic Death Disco Sound of Crocodile Shop

by Jim Testa

Old friends often ask me, "Whatever happened to Mod Fun?" And while I know the answer, more or less, it's not that easy to say. After two albums and a bunch of singles, two American tours and one of Europe, and about two years of amazing gigs in front of wiggled-out 6T's Scene fans, the band decided to toss the paisley shirts and Beatle boots in the dustbin (where they probably belonged) and move on. There was a brief period when they called themselves Paintbox and changed their sound to a more contemporary pop feel, something akin to the early Bongos meets the latterday Three O'Clock. But Paintbox saw the addition to the band of drummer Chris Collins' girlfriend on keyboards - and shades of Spinal Tap, the group disintegrated soon after. Mick London (guitar, vocals) and Bob Strete (bass) changed the name again. Now they were Crocodile Shop, with ex-Lord John drummer John Figler keeping the beat, and the polka-dotted 6T's look was replaced by lots of black - black clothing, black hair, and a dark, moody sound. Mick had learned quite a bit about distortion and feedback playing noise guitar in the Love Pushers and was using it in Croc Shop. The band's first EP, released in 1987 and called - satirically - "Head," continued Mod Fun's guitar-attack approach but with a darker, angrier, moodier sound. Then, after recording the second CrocShop record, Lullabye, Figler left, replaced by ex-Little Hood drummer Joel Weinberger. The gigs during this period were even more explosive, moodier, gothic. Mick & Bob were listening to music like Julian Cope and Red Lorry Yellow Lorry. Slowly the band's taste changed again, and they found themselves drawn to the digitally-nervewracking weirdness of Ministry and Skinny Puppy. Weinberger was suddenly gone, replaced by a Roland TR626 drum machine and an Alesis MMT8 sequencer. And it wasn't as if the guitar had distortion on it anymore; now it was more like there was a guitar sound buried somewhere underneath the distortion. Then an interview appeared in Splatter Effect revealing that the lead singer of Crocodile Shop was not Mick London, as everyone had thought, but Michael Hale. Finally, just as Minneapolis' Susstone Records was preparing to release Lullabye, Figler was rumored to be rejoining the band. So when people ask me, "Whatever happened to Mod Fun?" I answer, "Jesus, that's what I'd like to know." Accompanied by dyspeptic ex-rock critic and Romilar addict L. Cravat, I traveled to Crocodile Shop's suburban rehearsal space to try & find out... Present were Cravat, myself, Bob Strete, and Michael Hale.



L.Cravat: I want to know, Robert, why you've dyed your hair jet black, and I want to know, Mick, why you look like Johnny Depp. I don't understand this fashion statement.

Bob: I've had black hair for a long time now. I just don't like the way blond hair looks.

L.: Yes, but it's not the color God gave you.

Bob: So he made a mistake. No one's perfect.

Cravat: What about you, John?

Bob: Hanson, you have to call him. Hanson. That's Johnny Depp's character on 21 Jump St.

Mick: No comment. Is that the best question you can come up with?

Cravat: No, actually. I want to know how you can reconcile your mod past with your techno-punk present.

Mick: Is that what you're going to call it, techno punk? I was going to call it Sonic Death Disco.

Bob: We did the Mod stuff before anyone else did it.

Mick: We did the Mod thing before anybody else was into it.

Cravat: But was this whole mod thing just a pose? Did you just milk the mod thing until it was dry and then move onto this new pose?

Mick: No, we were into mod for like 3 1/2 years. It took us a long time to end sousing the way we sound. It's not like we just switched. We went through the strict Mod, like Jam '79, then the garage sloppy psychedelic thing, and then, like, we did pop for a while again, and then we got more into the punky thing. Back to roots. Back to the English punk stuff.

JT: Except it's what English punks are dancing to in 1988, not 1979.

Mick: But I always thought Bowie was the ultimate mod, because he changes everytime he comes out with a record.

Cravat: I always did think that the consistent factor in all of your bands is that you adopt someone else's style and then rip them off. In other words, you did the mod thing, then you did the Hoboken Pop thing, and now you're doing the New Order Techno Disco thing. Have you ever had an original thought in your life?

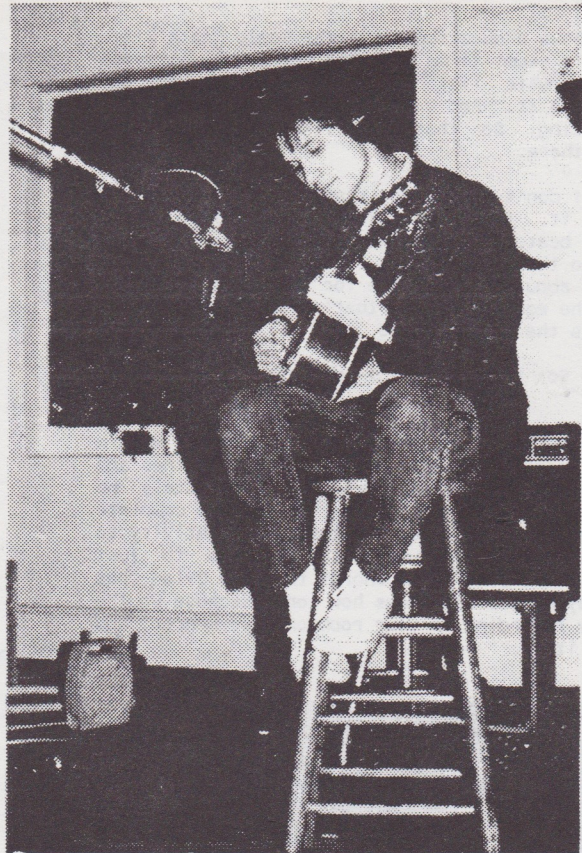
Mick: Yeah, my original idea was to do that. I don't think I rip other people off blatantly, I think I'm influenced by other things.

Cravat: So you don't want to be original, you're happy just being part of whatever is the status quo.

Mick: Well, that's one of the points I wanted to bring up. It seems to me that the status quo right now is really clean pop stuff. The Sugarcubes. Robyn Hitchcock.

Bob: R.E.M.

Mick: It's all this American country shit. I don't think we're like a lot of the bands that are doing what's in right now...we're not like 10,000 Maniacs or all the R.E.M. clones. I do do stuff as a reaction to what's hip...



At Water Music recording with The Love Pushers, November, 1985

Cravat: So you're trying to be accepted?

Mick: No, I'm trying not to be accepted. Like after Mod started getting a following, I didn't want to do it anymore.

Bob: Yeah, really, when we were doing all this Mod stuff, how could we be accepted when nobody else was into it?

Cravat: So is that your thing? You want to do stuff that nobody else likes?

Bob: No, we're just doing stuff that we like.

Mick: It's kind of fun making records and going around the country and playing for people. I listen to Crocodile Shop. I like it. I like the every phase of being in a band too...making up stickers, making up buttons, recording in a studio. But I don't care that much if other people like it.

Cravat: So why do you bother putting product out there and torturing other people?

Mick: So that when I go into a record store in Minneapolis, I like to see a used copy of my record in one of the bins. It makes me happy that way. So, like, if it has to get out there and sold new once for that to happen...

Cravat: So you enjoy having people but it and then not like and then having them sell it back.

Mick: That was the height of my musical career so far. I mean, who cares about playing in Germany or Italy. But when I saw a used copy of one of my records in Minneapolis, that made it worth it.

Crocodile Shop

Jim: I have a question about the Sonic Death Disco sound. It seems to me that the people who like the kind of music listen to it so they can go out dancing to it. And I know that you guys don't go out dancing. So that seems like an interesting paradox there.

Mick: I don't know about that. Maybe some people dance to it. I don't think we're that disco. It's just the beats. Like Skinny Puppy, people don't go dance to that, they just listen to it. I'm not thinking about the audience for that kind of music. We got the equipment, and that's the sound we like, so that's the way we sound.

Cravat: So the equipment dictates what you're doing?

Mick: Exactly. See, that's just the thing. When a lot of people hear that you have drum machines and sequencers, they think you have absolutely no creative input into it anymore, which is a complete misconception. Because it takes more creativity to write a song on a sequencer than it does to just bash out the same three chords that Bob Dylan has been playing for God knows how long. Because you're actually recording in your room on a sequencer, and editing it...



Mick The Mod at The Jetty, 1983

Jim: Songwriting becomes almost like computer programming.

Mick: Yeah, almost. There's more creative input now, I think, because you have to think about how parts go together from the very start of the song, rather than just recording live in the studio and then overdubbing ten more rock 'n roll guitar parts.

Cravat: But aren't you losing the spontaneity of creating music with a third or fourth band member?

Mick: Well, we do want to add more people. We don't want to be just a two-piece studio whatever thing. But for recording and for practicing, we only really need the two of us, because we can overdub cymbals and metal and samples and all kinds of stuff in the studio. We want to set up a lineup after we have the recorded thing that we have to sound like.

Jim: One thing you will lose, though, when you take this on a stage is the ability to improvise in the middle of the song. Because the machines aren't going to stop or play an extra six bars while you take a solo...

Cravat: ...or Mick decides to jump across the stage into the drum set and make the whole thing collapse, or as on one memorable occasion, if you decide you want to play "Born To Be Wild" for forty minutes.

Bob: Well, we might be using real drums.

Mick: Yeah, John [Figler] from the original lineup might be coming back, with some electronic drums that he plays, not just that he programs. And we want to have a couple of songs with "real" drummer drums. But we didn't just jump from playing "Born To Be Wild" to how we sound now. The whole interlude between Mod Fun and Crocodile Shop was us rehearsing a lot, and the songs were pretty mechanical anyway. We always played the same solos, the songs always lasted the same length. It wasn't like we were doing a lot of jamming then. And when a band rehearses over & over again, to get things right, they're not thinking, 'wow, we can really jam in this part.'

CROCODILE SHOP

Cravat: But that's not necessarily true. Look at Wire. They'd play "Snakedrill" every night on tour, and while there was a certain structure that was the same, it was programmed, it was thought out, but every single night it was different, it changed completely based on the audience mood and the band's response.

Mick: Right. And the same goes for when they did over theirs with the drum machine. Just because the drums are the same doesn't mean the guitars and the singing are going to be exactly the same every night either.

Jim: The Ex-Lion Tamers [the Wire cover band that accompanied Wire on two American tours - Mick was the bassist] were probably a lot more mechanical than Crocodile Shop will ever be, since you were just playing someone else's records every night.

Mick: Maybe that's why I'm like this. I like playing exactly the same way over & over again.

Jim: You told me you hated doing that in the Lion Tamers...

Mick: Well, I like playing my own music over & over.

Cravat: What about people who buy your new record that's coming out and expect to hear that music when they come to see you? Because the new record isn't that big a stretch from the late Mod Fun.

Bob: It also isn't that far from what we're doing now.

Mick: I think it's closer to what we're doing now. Because "Head" is more like, the end of Mod Fun.

Cravat: You're not playing any of the songs on that album, though.

Bob: Not now we're not.

Mick: We'll probably be doing at least two or three of them when we get the drums happening.

Cravat: Do you anticipate touring behind this record?

Mick: Possibly. We'd actually like to get this next record out and then tour with three records behind us. I don't know if it would pay to tour behind this record. I mean, it's not going to be on a big label or anything. I'd rather have this record come out while we're recording the new one, and then do something after that. Although we probably will do some small shows locally just to get things worked out. Because we really just started on this new trip a few months ago, so we're still working out a few things.

Cravat: I'd like to get to something else. Why did you change your name from your real name to Mick London and now to Michael Hale?

Mick: I felt like it. I woke up in the morning and it seemed like the thing to do. I mean, I came up with the name Mick London and the name Mod Fun when I was 16 years old. And now I'm 22 and it just doesn't fit anymore. So I don't see it as being such a big deal.

Cravat: So changing your name is like changing your hairstyle to you?

Mick: Right. My next name is going to be Johnny Depp. No, it's just that some of us weren't born with such a pretty-sounding god-given name as DeRogatis...

Cravat: L. Cravat, L. Cravat!

Mick: ...so we have to go with what we think sounds good. I didn't do it for any reason other than I felt like having a different name that I liked the way it sounded. And when I was 16 I liked the way Mick London sounded, and now I like the way Michael Hale sounds, and I don't like the way my real name sounds, so I didn't want to use it.

Cravat: So you like the idea of reinventing yourself?

Mick: Right. We are into the whole chameleon thing of sounding different when you want to sound different. Sort of reinventing the sound & ourselves.



The last Mod Fun show in America, on the pier in Hoboken, July 4, 1986

Cravat: Bob, how do you feel about this? All of a sudden, Mick says to you he's going to change the direction of the band, or maybe he doesn't even say it, he just starts writing these different kinds of songs...

Bob: If I don't like the song, I'm going to say I don't like it.

Mick (agitated): You're asking the question in a way I don't think it happened.

Cravat: So, Bob, how does it happen? How does this chameleon change its colors?

Bob: It's just a progression, I guess. You get bored playing the same thing all the time. And even bands you listen to you get bored with, so you start listening to something else and you get influenced by other things.

Cravat: Do you think it's because you're products of the television age, weaned on Sesame Street, that you have such short attention spans?

Mick: [very sarcastically] I don't know.

(Stop tape while group looks for bottle opener to open more beer)

Bob: And another thing, most of the bands I listen to now have that hi-tech sound. Most of the bands around here are too scared or whatever to do what we're doing now.

Mick: A lot of the local bands are so down-home country. Like, let's pick up some really shitty guitars and play thru some really shitty amps and sound real garage and American. And that's almost what we did for, like, a very brief three months. And we finally realized you have to do what you want to do, you can't just be content with sounding like what you think your limits are. And we used to think our limits were guitars. And, you know, we got all this electronic stuff we wanted and now we sound like something else...

Bob: How could we listen to what we're listening to now and still sound like the typical 3-piece local band? Like R.E.M. or something.

Mick: I think R.E.M. is the worst band ever.

Bob: It seems like everybody wants to be R.E.M. and they can't do it. To me, that's what the whole Maxwells scene is like now. It's just a bunch of slobs with long hair who like R.E.M.

Cravat: There's a whole lot more going on in New York than R.E.M.

Mick: Oh yeah, well, we know what's going on. But we don't want to be Sonic Youth either.

Cravat: Why do you still sing with an English accent?

Bob: ...because Michael Stipe does.

Mick: Yeah, right. No. Because that's what I think sounds good and when I open my mouth, that's what comes out.

Jim: The new stuff has a very obvious nasty, pissed-off edge to it. Where does that come from? Is that just the kind of vocal that complements this kind of music?

Mick: It's not just that I'm trying to go for that style. You have to listen to the words too. The words are more direct now. For a while, the words could go just anywhere.

Jim: But you're writing the words. Where are the words coming from?

Mick: From being pissed off.

Cravat: What do you have to be pissed off about?
[A lengthy diatribe about Crocodile Shop's material comforts follows]

Mick: Okay, I know I'm a spoiled brat. That's what I'm mad at. It's just such a complacent thing. I'm not mad about materialistic things. I'm just mad about the way things are, and that I can't change things. Everything is all-encompassing. I wouldn't be writing these kinds of lyrics if I didn't want to sing that way, if I didn't want to have the sequencer doing the synthesizer that way. It is a certain sound, but the songs are angrier than I've written in a long time. In fact, some of the songs we do now we were doing before we had the synthesizer or drum machine, and they were angry then too.



Jim: What do you think about now when you listen to your old Mod Fun records.

Mick: They sound sort of interesting to me, but they don't really sound like records. They sound like these weird things we did at one period in our lives. Not all of them, but, like, the albums especially are really weird sounding.

Bob: Yeah, they are. You wonder sometimes why you even bothered to put them out.

Mick: And interestingly enough, the albums were the ones where I had other people telling me what to do. The first album it was the engineer, telling me how to sing. And the second album it was Dave [Amels, of Cryptovision Records] just totally missing all my points. But the singles were way more how we wanted to sound, even our demos sounded better than the albums.

Jim: It seemed to me, though, that with Mod Fun, you were always a pop band, in that you were making music because you wanted to entertain other people. And now I'd say you were an art band, because you say you're just making music to please yourselves.

Mick: When you talk about playing live, of course you want people to at least seem like they're enjoying it, or otherwise you get self-conscious. But even when we were Mod Fun, there was a whole 'nother side, the writing side, that is the way we wanted to sound and that's what we wanted to hear then. Just because it was more poppy and more entertaining doesn't mean we were just doing it for other people. We do want to play live with this band. And we want to make it more of a show-type thing, too. Like we want to have films going and stuff. We tried it at a few shows with [projecting] the slides, but it wasn't enough, they were too plain. It didn't add that much. It's just right now we're going through a little bit of a metamorphosis, trying to get our sound together.

Mick: Well, there are phases. I think that when we finished that first [Crocodile Shop] record, it was the way we wanted it to sound at that point. And when we finally finished the second record, that was the way we wanted it to sound then. And now we're only into the second or third month of this version.

Cravat: For the sake of history, what did happen to Joel?

Bob: He didn't listen to any of the same music we do. And he didn't want Crocodile Shop to sound the way we want it to either. He's one of those people I was talking about before who's just happy being in a band, but he doesn't want to try anything different.

Cravat: How do you feel when some teenage kid in Minneapolis or Germany picks up the "Hangin' Around" Mod Fun EP and writes you that it's the greatest thing he's ever heard. Do you have the temptation to shake that kid by the shoulders and say, no, Crocodile Shop is going to be the greatest thing you've ever heard, you just don't know it yet?

Mick: No. In the beginning of Crocodile Shop, I tried to do interviews and stuff and send a lot of promotional stuff to all the people who did big Mod Fun articles, like in Spain, Italy, Germany, and Washington and San Francisco. And I did interviews and told them we're not into that kind of stuff anymore, and we're influenced more by like Pink Floyd and Echo & The Bunnymen. But if people are into the 60s thing, that's fine, it was fine for us when we were into it. But it's just not 1984 anymore and we're into very different things...We haven't gone the opposite way, is what I'm trying to say. It's more of a progression. It's like, when I had that fanzine, Chris wrote that thing and he said, 'After most of the mods in L.A. are through being Mods, they paint their scooters green and dress in black and go on to something else. So it's like, a lot of people have gone through the same stages that we've gone through. But they haven't been in a band.'



The Ex-Lion Tamers, 1987



Uncle Bob Touched Me

People say Bucks County, PA just hasn't been the same happenin' place since the Paper Mill Playhouse burnt down, but Uncle Bob Touched Me is a new quartet that's out to prove different. The members - Andy, bass; Frank, guitar; Rob, drums; and Jeff, vocals and guitar - have been around the block a few times in such legendary combos as Quasimodo & The Eunuchs, the Goiters, the Klogz, and Love Battery. At their first gig, they were told they could never play Philadelphia's Club Revival again, to which guitarist Frank Sleestak remarked, "Oh damn, does that mean we'll never be able to play here for 4 walls and 2 hair farmers on a Wednesday night again? Our careers are over!" Jeff Fox, the band's sexy lead singer, commented, "Shit, I wouldn't miss another episode of Wiseguy just to play this armpit again anyway!" They've been heralded as "the next Suzi Cozmo Band" and chastised for their name (a tad homophobic, some say) and their stance on the Macaroni & Cheese vs. Cheese & Macaroni debate. Sensitive and controversial - what more could you want? How about funny? They're that too. The music - grungy punk/core with yuks. Philly legend Joe Jack Talcum recently reported that he'd never be able to write a song about phlegm now that UBTM has penned the definitive ode to mucous, "Phlegm Sucks." That and other witty tunes appear on the band's first demo, soon to be followed by their second demo. Singer Jeff is also the wiseguy responsible for the ha-ha-hardcore fanzine Maximum Rock N Raoul. Write the band c/o Frank Sleestak, 244 Newtown Rd., Richboro, PA 18954 and remember their motto: "We're the band with two cars who are proud to say that no matter how hot it gets, they'll never play with their shirts off. And you can take that to the bank."

BAD KARMA - "Three On A Match" Demo
% Doug Vizthum, 34 York Drive, Apt. 5A, Edison, NJ 08817

An interesting phenomenon has been growing in the past few years. The original spark of fast/loud/complaint-infested 'punk' music eventually became a formula, then a cliché. Beginning with bands like the Minutemen, Husker Du, the Buttholes, the mold was then shattered. Later, loads of other less-recognized bands either broke up or mutated to something much different. Except for the metal sellout, this was a much needed breath of fresh air.

Doug "Sluggo" Vizthum used to play smokin' lead guitar with one of Jersey's best-remembered hardcore units, Pleased Youth. He also has been playing a completely different type of lead for just about as long in John Richey's Lunar Bear Ensemble, although this band gigs much less frequently. Although Lunar Bear still exists, they're currently on hold as their drummer, Martin Atkins (of Pil and Brian Brain fame) recently split to bash for Killing Joke. So three members of this fine group (with their first lp unfortunately still in the can and unreleased) have decided to branch out and start their own sub-group - BAD KARMA.

Bad Karma are a solid, tight, burnin' trio. Each member comes from a different musical background - bassist/backup vocalist Tom DiEllo is a monster bass player with a thick, pumping, funk-possessed fat sound; whirlwind drummer Wally Bird used to play with the psycho-voodoo rock unit The Young Turks, as well as percussion for LBE; and of course Vizthum has his hc roots.

The first Bad Karma release is an 8-song demo called "Three On A Match" and it's a barrel of fun. It just makes me wanna jump around. Sluggo sings lead throughout, a first for him and a really good job. His lyrics are pretty much tongue-in-cheek and he just loves to goof on the ridiculous contradictions and absurdities of our current culture, from careless kamikaze driving to the ineffective morals of television's eternal Christian youth program, "Davey And Goliath," to the out-of-place stupidity of urban cowboys and rednecks, Vizthum's observations are humorously sad but often true.

Unexpectedly, Bad Karma seems to have been influenced by rockabilly and even some surf music, although their version is more revved up and appropriately trashed. A couple of songs remind me of guitar great (and often burnt-out) Chris Spedding (altho there's a good chance that Doug hasn't even heard of him), especially the cool but nasty slide-guitar work on "White Trash."

Most successful is their closer, "One Way Ticket To Hell," a total satire of heavy metal gigs and the myriad of knuckleheads who attend them [an updating perhaps of Pleased Youth's priceless "Lunkhead?" - Ed.] A shit-kicking guitar solo and even some sick whammy-bar hystionics are perfect ingredients for this goof, as well as a radio-like ad for the SATAN phone line. Too much. All in all, a great tribute to a great culture we all know & love. Yeah, right!??

- Rockin' Rollo Gallanter



by Jim Testa

STETZ. Or maybe that should be, STETZ? Ever since there's been a Jersey Beat, there's been a STETZ. Ever since there's been any sort of indie rock scene in the Garden State, in fact.

1982: The dB's and Bongos toiled in Hoboken, the A.O.D. boys made a lot of jokey noise on the backstreets of East Paterson, all sorts of new-wavey nobodies came & went through the Dirt Club, and off in a quiet little corner of Union, NJ, there were these kids in a basement inventing this little scene all their own. STETZ? The answer, now as then, is, Yes.

The band first turned up on Johnny Dirt's wonderfully scummy garage-band punk compilation, HARDCORE TAKES OVER, back in 1982. There were demos and then, in 1986, the band's lp, Songs Of Experience. This year, the band released a cassette tracing their entire history, from basement garage-band to accomplished scene veterans.

There have been more vocalists, bassists, and guitarists pass through the ranks of STETZ than practically any other band on the planet (except Chicago and Raging Slab), but the current configuration includes founding fathers Brian X. Sommer on guitar and lead vocals and Wayne Russo on drums, with John Rinaldi on bass and Lito deLeon on lead guitar. The following interview was done with Brian Sommer.

Q: The first and most obvious question is, Why? Why have you stayed with it for so long, and what do you get out of the band that's kept you and Wayne going through so many thin times and setbacks?

We do what we do because music is a main ingredient in the lives of all four members of STETZ. Once we started, there was just no turning back. Kinda like an orgasm! Individually, we all get off on each other's playing abilities. Besides fun, being creative is really what's kept us going. We like our style 'cause it incorporates a sloppy tightness.

In the future, we would just like to keep doing what we've been doing for so long - recording, playing, and working on new songs. If people like us, fine. If not, that's still ok. There's nothing like the feeling of gratification you get from a receptive audience but we're not addicted to it and we don't need it to survive. The music keeps us going.

Q: How long exactly has the band been together? Have your reasons for being in the band changed since you started?

STETZ was official born in September of 1982, although Wayne and I conceived the child in January, 1980. Our reasons for being in the band have both changed and remained the same. In the beginning, all we cared about was playing our tunes in the basement. The thought of playing out or appearing on records never even entered our minds. But now, playing and recording are both very important to us, and we love doing them. We've changed (frown!?) in that respect. But we haven't changed in the respect that the band is our musical outlet. It's a fix that can't be detoxed (and who would want it to be?)

Q: Brian, it always seemed very obvious to me that you should be the lead singer in the band, yet for a long time you experimented with different vocalists. Why? And how do you enjoy both singing and playing lead now?

When we started, I was scared shitless. I remember summing up the situation in that if I didn't sing, we'd have a punk band with no vocals, which is ridiculous. There was a period we decided our trio was boring to watch, so we called on the services of Kyle Eaves (ex-Bodies In Panic). He lasted 5 months and by that time I knew that STETZ sounded best with my vocals.

I love singing and playing, but what I love even more is that John, our new bass player, sings. So on a couple of tunes, he sings lead and I'm able to cavort around the stage. Presently, I'm looking to buy a wireless [pickup], so I can move all around without getting unplugged.

STETZ

A Band For

All Seasons



Q: Looking back over the last 6 years, how have you seen the Jersey rock scene change?

Well, we're not exactly the swingin' men about town, but we'll take a shot... The biggest change I've seen over the years is the rise of the "Every Band For Itself" complex. At the height of the scene (1984-85), bands were very involved in other bands' existences. Not only did groups support each other on & off stage, but we would actually get shows for each other. This brotherhood among bands isn't very evident today and it's one of the things we miss most about the past, along with the good ol' places we used to play (may the Union Recreation Center rest in peace). We think the most positive thing about the current scene is the continuation of the "Do It Yourself" ideal that punk was founded on. Write your own songs, set up your own shows, make your own records, etc. Don't sit around and wait for things to happen to you - make them happen! Although the music and styles have changed over the years, this is one belief that has remained constant.

Q: My earliest memories of STETZ are of a 100% hardcore band. How would you describe the band now, and how would you say your music has changed over the years?

We would describe ourselves as having a heavy punk foundation with influences from every form of music imaginable (country, hard rock, blues, rockabilly, funk, etc.) We're a veritable melting pot of musical mayhem, but with an aggressive tightness that keeps everything moving. This is a bit of a change from our early days. As you said, in the beginning we were pretty much a hardcore band. In 1982-83, hardcore was still new and exciting. But too much of any good thing gets boring and there were just too many bands that were playing the same music and screaming the same things (YOU SUCK! THEY SUCK! WE SUCK! AAAHHHHH!!) So we just started adding different musical ingredients to our existing style.

Q: This is a question I always ask - what's the best and worst part of being in a band?

The best part is without a doubt just playing, whether it be in front of 500 people in a club or in front of ourselves in the basement. If we're playing as tight as possible and sounding our best, we're very happy and we want a pizza. The thing we're most proud of doing is making our album. When we first got together, the thought of making a record never even crossed our minds. It was too far out of reach. So when we finally had the finished album in our paws, we jumped up and then came down.

Our worst experience was the first time we played City Gardens in August, 1986. To make a long story short, we were introduced to the audience and told to play while our bass player was still en route to the club! The funniest thing that ever happened to us was a drive we took to Connecticut to play at a joint called The Anthrax. It was a 90 minute ride in pouring rain with no windshield wipers. To remedy this situation, we brought along a mop. Every so often, Frank would practically climb out onto the hood of our speeding Stetzmobil and mop the windshield. While all this was happening, Frank's girlfriend was yelling at him from the car to be careful and Brian was complaining that the rain pouring through the open window was getting him wet and he'd catch a cold... A road trip with STETZ is something that should be experienced by every life form.

Q: What's next?

In January, STETZ will begin recording their 2nd lp, probably at Real Platinum Studios in Lodi, NJ. In closing, we'd like to say that STETZ has never had a better attitude about their music. If you don't believe us, we dare you to see one of our shows and not have a good time!



SCUM

Rock Report

by John Lisa

A HISTORY OF THE SHAVE PIGS & SCUM ROCK

Let's see, the Shaved Pigs' first 3-song 7" came out in '86, with a predominantly hardcore feel. Killer cuts similar to the DK's style with rather retarded lyrics. But there was one huge radio hit, "Too Fat To Flirt," which tore up the charts only to be knocked off by the Butthole Surfers' "Sweat Loaf." Anyhow, the Pigs' first full-length record in 1987 was called Breakfast Is Served and had a mildly offensive cover. This record featured Roy "Wildman" Edroso (who's also in the Reverb Motherfuckers). It seems kinda funny but as the Shaved Pigs progress, they drift more away from the punk rock/hardcore thing and more toward the 8th Wonder of the World: Skum Rock.

Skum Rock: Bands like 1/2 Japanese, Sharkey's Machine, Pussy Galore, Killdozer, and B.A.L.L., who play good songs through basically bad equipment, usually with a guitar sound that sounds like total horseshit.

That's not the case with the Shaved Pigs' new lp, Cheers (Porcine Records, Box 888, New York, NY 10024). This is a godhead record. Just a tad more diverse than the Breakfast lp, this one makes more use of saxophone, noise gtr, and all that other shit. But the tunes are catchy and very happenin', as are all of Roy Edroso's projects. The Shaved Pigs are also cool in the sense that if they've got something to say, they don't beat around the bush. They come right out and say it. And they're not gonna change their name or lyrics to become more artsy or less offensive. Yes, this is a cut about the scum - top tunes are "Get A Job," "Choking On Vomit," and "Chariots Of The Mods." This ultra-hot lp does make a lot of ugly noise but keeps in touch with reality. It's also produced by Kramer, but don't let that stop you. Buy it anyway. Interesting cover art too. Strong, opinionated, political lyrics. Mixes well with alcohol and drugs. Snap it up 'cos this band's got balls.

The Reverb Motherfuckers' Route 666 is a spinoff from the Shaved Pigs, Roy Edroso's field day, if you will, and it's one fuck of a great record. Half the songs are dirty skumrockers with lotsa grungy low-ended guitar and bass, having an almost singalong quality. The others are dancey tape-loop drones, weird and psychedelic. But the highlights are definitely two of the grunge-rockers - a cover of Led Zep's "Whole Lotta Love" entitled "Who Got The Crack," and the other "Highway To Hojo's" about a mysterious restaurant of some sort up from hell. Surprisingly good recording quality on a record that probably had a very low budget, and each lp comes in a personalized silkscreened jacket, signed and numbered. I believe there were only 666 pressed or something. Anyway, watch for the RMF's around town, they're doing a lot of shows and sell great tshirts featuring their cover art at reasonable prices. Track this record down and PLAY LOUD!

The Daylights' "King" EP (109 Records, 109 St. Marks Place, NYC 10009) is weird echoey grungefunk with good hooks and a small section of noise samplings. Good production too. Looks like it'll be a hit on college radio. The tracks do seem to follow some kind of strange progression and the vocalist is above average, but this does get kind of bland at times.

BANDS ONLY A MUTHA COULD LOVE (CD only, Mutha Records, PO Box 416, W. Long Branch, NJ 07764) brings Scum Rock into the CD age. Here are 37 tracks by some 30 different bands presenting exactly the same sort of low-budget garage-metal 4-track punkrock grunge that Mutha's been releasing on vinyl for years. A little judicious jockeying with the Program button on the ol' CD player and you can put together a decent ep's worth of shit, with Sticism, Porno Dracula, and Sticks And Stones among the better local bands. The national acts read like a Who's Who culled from the MRR demo review section - No Mind from Canada, Crippled By Society from Texas, Bloody Mess from Chicago - and the German, Dutch, and Finnish bands provide 30 second blasts of total distorto thrash/noise. None of these tracks sound noticeably better reproduced on a CD than they would on a mono Victrola, which is about the Scummiest marketing concept I can imagine. (If you thought the Ramones wrote short songs, check this out - only 8 of the 37 songs here are longer than 2 1/2 minutes). And here's a scary thought. It says here, "Volume 1." (Jim Testa)





RAGING SLAB

RAGING SLAB

"True Death" EP

Buy Our Records

The name Raging Slab made me nervous at first. I instantly thought of 3-million-mile-an-hour thrash guitar playing, and belching vocals concerned with necrophilia. So the first notes of "Get Off My Jollies" were a relief and a surprise. Their name aside, this band's more in the tradition of brash and slightly bluesy hard rock. Lead singer Greg has a classic, throaty metal voice and performance-wise, he's got a nice arrogant attitude. They're capable of some spirited guitar outbursts, but basically the Slab are a steady-rocking band; tight, semi-funky, gritty. The Cult and AC/DC seem like possible influences. There's a touch of garage-band rawness about them too, but I like it. (For some reason, this 4-song EP conjures up images of early 70's kids with their hair down to the seats of their ripped jeans, rolling joints and playing music in their parents' garages, writing defiant, cryptic lyrics that confused even them.) I'm not real hip as to what "Shrivel" and "Thunder Chucker" are about, though I can guess, but in hard rock, the music matters more than the lyrics, and Raging Slab delivers on that end. They're not afraid to spring a few surprises on listeners just to keep it different...like the Southern Rock influences in the rollicking keys on "Shrivel," or its jagged, see-saw opening chords. Musical twists 'n turns (along with the title) on "I Heard The Owl" give this moody, bluesy kind of song a menacing edge. The spirit of early 70's "people's bands" like Grand Funk lives on through "True Death." It's pretty cool.

- Debbie Sager

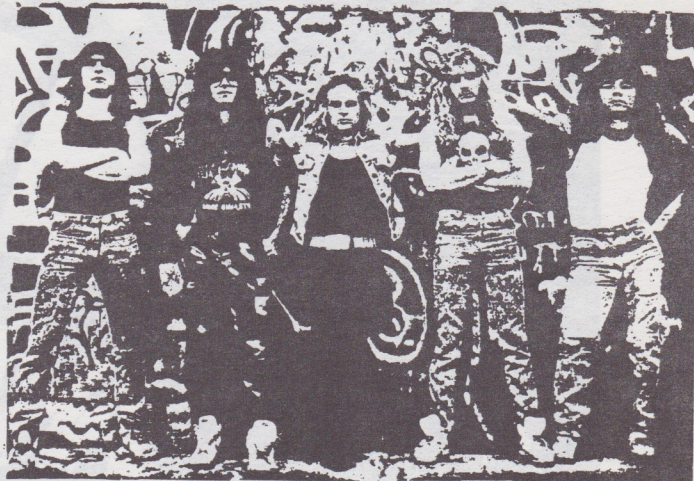
ATTACKER - The Second Coming (Mercenary/Celluloid)

HADES - If At First You Don't Succeed (Torrid)

These two lp's share a few things - both are by NJ metal bands on their second albums, both have vocalists who wail in a piercing falsetto, and while both qualify as "metal," I wouldn't call either one particularly "heavy." The big difference is the songwriting. Attacker comes from the sci-fi/fantasy school of metaldom; Second Coming is a concept album which, like the band's first lp, tells an epic story of good vs. evil, full of medieval swords 'n sorcery images. I suppose if I were 17 and totally into this stuff it would actually make sense; on the other hand, if I spent all day playing with Rubik's Cube I could probably figure that out too. As it is, I have a life, thank you, and quite frankly the storyline of Second Coming struck me as totally incomprehensible. The band does get points for technical proficiency - if you're into guitar heroes and rhythmic virtuosity, you'll probably get off on their grandstanding hystrionics. On the other hand, this band can't write a melody or a memorable riff for love or money, and there isn't a song here that'll stick in your head for a minute after the record's over.

Hades' virtuosity lies in their lyrics; even amid the deluge of indie vinyl nowadays, their originality stands out. There are songs on If At First... about animal rights, work, and astrology (all pro); diplomatic immunity and macho lunkheads who leer at girls (con); and even a nine-minute mini-rock opera based on "Hamlet." Sadly, for all the clever words, the music doesn't do much for me; like Attacker, Hades seems immune to the allure of the drop-dead riff or killer hook. Call me old-fashioned, but I still yearn for the days when you could hear a heavy-metal song before you go to bed and wake up the next morning still humming the tune.

- Jim Testa



ATTACKER

BIG STICK

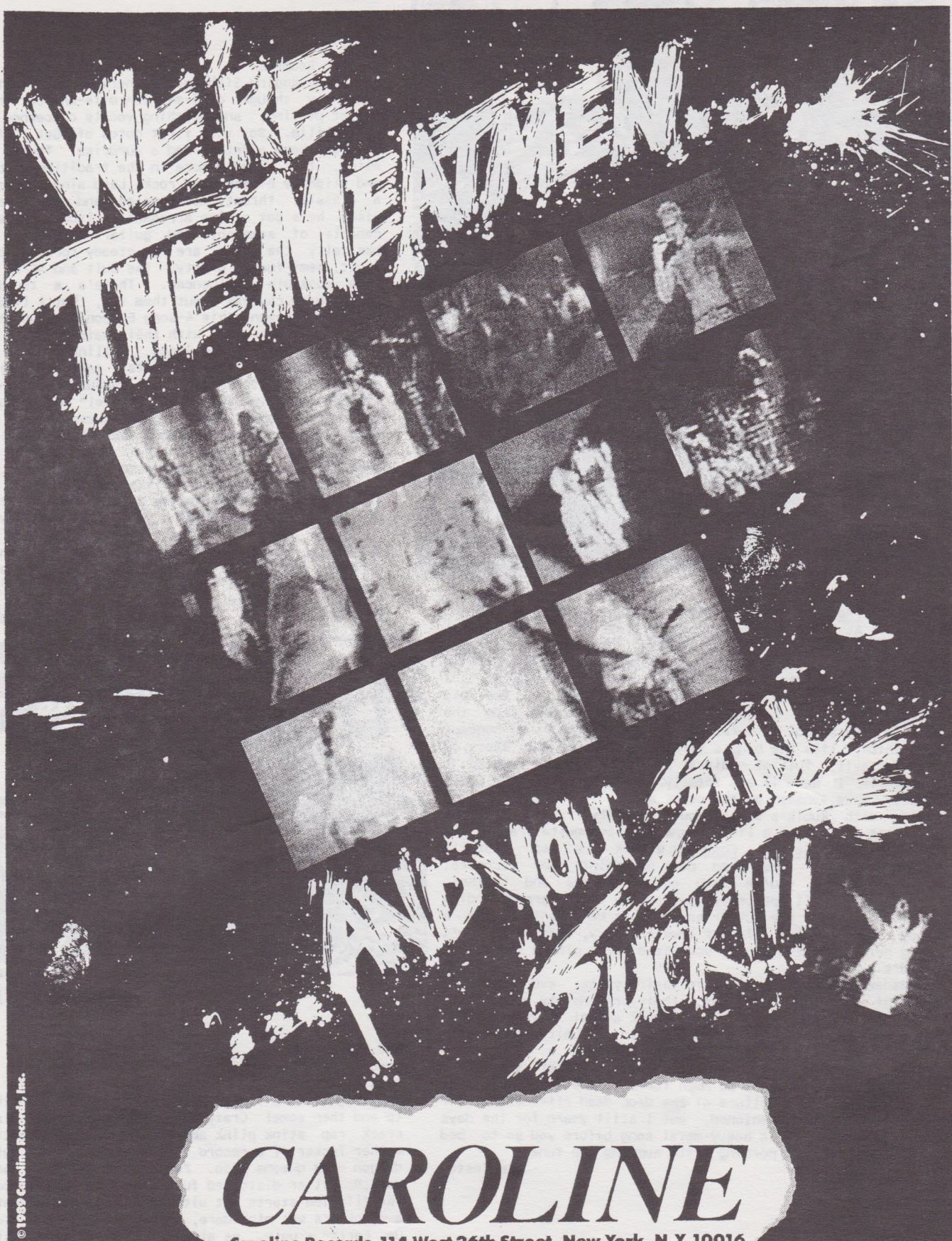
Crack N Drag, LP

Blast First!/Buy Our

Big Stick's first two EP's are reissued on this lp and then some! Crazy loop noise rock beat blast crack rap stink plink abrasive noisy shit-eating mother fucker of a record. Fake tattoos on 2 weird dragon drag queens also. Features "Billy Jack Paddy Wack," killer distorted fucked up funk masterpiece. The flipside starts out with "Shoot The President," a junkie's wet nightmare, "Drag Racing," and "Hell On Earth" - ugly, as always, "I Look Like Shit" sounds like it too. Who knows where this duo scores their dope and who cares, as long as it gives them the same head that it gave them when this trash was recorded.

- John Lisa

THEIR GREATEST SHITS...LIVE!



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**OUT NOW ON SHINY BLACK VINYL
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WHITE TRASH - NY Folk Volume 1

109 Records (109 St. Marks, Pl., New York NY 10009)

When Bobby Dylan set his folk music to rock, he started up a revolution of sorts. Everyone knows that and everyone's been affected by it. Twenty-three years later, 13 young men & women deliver a track apiece to 109 Records and put out this here White Trash compilation, a comp with broad definitions as to what's folk. Which is cool, cuz the best tracks here transcend the topical/political realm and surge into the heart of something deeper.

Anyone who's already decided that this album sounds like Vega, Chapman...might as well stop reading. The point is wasted on you. Nuthin' here sounds ANYTHING near studio "polish" and the best of it needn't be ashamed of it either.

The girls here pretty much clean up. The sincerity and versatility of their material sets them a stock higher than the "male" contributors. There's a certain dignity in Vanessa Veselka's screams, a snotty sexual thing with Jenny Blowdryer and a touching story by Lauren Stauber that all bypass folk limitations, driving the music harder than than the other contributors.

Not to discount the guys totally. If Mark Zero, Steve Witt and Lach weren't so busy paying a vague homage to the old folksters, they too could have a bigger slice of success. As it stands, no desert and straight to bed. Tom Clark and Reisbaum have both brought songs that deal with violence, domestic & otherwise. Both work to great effect.

Overall, it's a good comp to own cuz who knows where these people will be in ten years. Besides, it commemorates that riot of riots, Tompkin Square Park (check Roger Manning's "Real Estate Blues"). And History is History no matter how hard the big boys try to distort it. Listen to the little guys. The times always need a'changin'.

- Rob O'Connor

LIVING EARTH

Living Earth, LP

Relix, PO Box 92, Brooklyn, NY 11229

It was no surprise what type of music would dance out of my speakers. The cover features some soothing pastel-psychedelic earth & red roses imagery, two of the six dudes in the band are wearing tie-dyed t-shirts, plus they do a rare, early, unrecorded Dead tune and a relatively rare Dylan tune as well. Not to mention the two Lieber/Stoller/Pomus 50's songs, something Jerry Garcia might well do in his solo band.

The real surprise is how consistently cool the tunes & grooves are throughout. This is a great party record for those not afraid to admit they still love some of the better 60's sounds. Fine playing as well as great vocalizing between the 3 or 4 singers help, and although only 7 of the 11 tunes here are originals, the music all fits together like the smooth mosaic on the jacket.

Some of it just feels so nice, them two 50's tunes had me dancing around the room. "It's Only Love" has superb Garth Hudson-like organ and warm vocals, and a unique groove that's close to reggae. Dylan's "Meet Me In The Morning" is treated so dark & sad, a pulsating blues with an effective bent tone to the vocal, harmonica, and guitar.

These dudes have a most subtle soulfulness and nice melodies that often shine through and make you smile. Although many of the tunes are Deadlike in their structure, it really doesn't matter, because their hearts are in the right place. That's what counts. And they supposedly jam out live. This was recorded in South Jersey, where I believe they're from. I certainly hope so. Let's put 'em on a bill with Frozen Concentrate and Always August and just freak out!

- Rockin' Rollo Gallanter

Various Artists

We Killed McKinley, LP

Maxwell, PO Box 296, Buffalo, NY 14216

Music from Buffalo and a mixed bag it is, although a few cuts make the whole lp worthwhile. Check out the Splatcats' rampagin' cover of "Get Ready," the Goo Goo Dolls' Stooges-damaged "No Way Out," and Peach L'Amour's glam slam "Lucille." There's also garage rock, electronic dance, and good ol' rock 'n roll going on here.

- J.T.

Various Artists

Hard To Be Cool In An Uncool World, LP

I Wanna, Box 166 Wright Bros Sta., Dayton, OH 45409

My favorite compilation lp of 1988, with a national potpourri of underground gems. The comp starts off on a high note by unearthing an unreleased Human Switchboard tune, recorded during their final days in Hoboken waiting for that big record deal that never came through. The song deals with just situation, with a bittersweet Myrna Marcarian vocal. Austin's great True Believers follow with a double dose of live punk, as they combine the Velvets' "Foggy Notion" and the Stooges' "Search & Destroy." Wow! Other great cuts include the Obvious' punk anthem to shitty little clubs and indie labels, "The Underground;" Hoboken's Schramms and Tall Lonesome Pines, and some primo rockabilly from Frankie Camaro. If you only buy one compilation lp this year...

- J.T.

MAROON

The Funky Record, LP

Arb, 418 E. Kingsley #2, Ann Arbor, MI 48104

The Funky Record is a new record by Maroon. The band Maroon is made up of two middle-aged guys (in my book) that sing pretty good. I think they have good drum beats and good rhythms. Some of the song titles looked pretty good on paper, and I think they make a pretty good rap group. They sound like they listen to a lot of Beastie Boys and Run-DMC. If I was rating this record, I would give it a 7.

- Severin Wuelfing

LOCAL TUNEAGE

P.E.D.

Post Ejaculation Depression, LP
New Red Archives

Horny loudmouth New Brunswick oddballs P.E.D. finally get a chance to make a record with a decent recording budget and a little time to polish the rough edges, and Jesus H. Christ but if they don't come off as nearly god-like as Stink!-era Replacements or something. From the cretinous dissin' guitar stomp of "Homeboy Cab Driving Death Stomp" to the driving post-punk guitar mosh of near-classics like "NCO2" and "Let's Fuck," this is one of those records you'll be bragging about owning to the new kids on the scene in about 5 years. On piss-yellow vinyl yet. Buy.

SCHOOL OF VIOLENCE

We the people...? LP
Death/Metal Blade

School of Violence - or specifically Steg Von Heintz and whatever band he's put together recently - have been doing the CBGB circuit for a while now with these nasty blunt-edged tunes. I'd hesitate to call this hardcore or speedmetal or whatever since it reminds me most of Motorhead, a band that I think transcends those genres. Let's just call this a damn good rock record for those who like it heavy 'n hard and leave it at that, ok?

DAS DAMEN

"Marshmallow Conspiracy," EP

SST

The cover of "Magical Mystery Tour" alone is worth the price of this 'un (play the psychedelic end part backwards and you can actually hear Lyle Hysen whisper, "I buried Thurston, I buried Thurston..."), but "Bug" and "Sky Yen" are pretty bitchin' examples of the Damen's inflammatory sonic mindfuck too. So, like, why didn't they do a whole album instead of this 4-song doodad?

HONEYMOON KILLERS

"Take It Off," EP

Buy Our Records, Box 363, Vauxhall, NJ 07088

Reduced to a trio, the Honeymoon Killers (two gals & a guy, if you're counting) turn to minimalist Cramps-style grunge for inspiration, re-introducing the concept of Lead Drums. These songs start with The Beat, followed by the bass, which accentuates the Beat, and then embellished by vocals and a little guitar. Less raw and painfully noisy than they used to be (sound like anybody else reviewed this issue?), this new EP is actually catchy and can be enjoyed with the volume set at less than 10. Progress, my friends, progress.

BOUNCING OFF BOB

"Cha Cha Cha At The Coral Reef," EP

Stretch, 16 Frederick Ct., Cedar Grove, NJ 07009

While I have nothing against the recycled Buddy Hollyisms, rockabilly licks, and New Wave foofoo proffered by the 5 gentlemen known as Bouncing Off Bob, I'd like it all a little better if they managed to mold their stock influences into a more memorable (or at least original) pastiche. Instead of just having one song that sounds like Buddy Holly, one that sounds like old rockabilly, and one that sounds like The Knack.

WEEN

The Live Brain Wedgie, LP

Bird O'Prey, Box 39, Trenton, NJ 08601

What is a Ween? 2 nutty teenage goofballs - one sings, one throttles a guitar, and they carry around a tape of bass, drums, 'n noize. Their songs are mostly short, usually funny, and always fun; just the sort of nonsense you'd expect from a couple of suburban smart alecks who shared a doobie every morning before first period calculus. Dean & Gene Ween just totally blew away the hip crowd at the Jersey Beat Benefit last year, and side 1 of this disc gives ya a very similiar set of vintage Weenage. Side B is newer studio stuff (although it sounds like it was recorded in the Butthole Surfers' garage during a toxic Nitrous Oxide leak), including their hilarious R.E.M. sendup, "Hippie Smell." They also desecrate doo wop, blues, and psychedelia. Fun fun fun. Bite a Ween today.

FANZINES

CHAIRS MISSING #3

PO Box 375, Fairfield, CT 06430 \$1.00

Editor Scott Munroe has finally abandoned this zine's earliest format, which paid homage to Wire and Wire-ish bands (hence the name, taken from the band's 2nd lp). Here he's just into stuff he likes and shows damn near unarguable good taste (i.e. he interviews bands I like too - Sonic Youth, Naked Raygun, Verbal Assault, Nomeansno, and SNFU), plus record reviews, a Cosloyesque letters page, and more lingerie pinups. Oi!

METHOD ZINE #4

19038 Canadian Ct., Gaithersburg, MD 20879 \$2

A small format sk8zine, almost all pix, including some from the editor's tour of America. I thought more of this when I saw the editor's photo and realized he can't be more than 15, since the layout's not bad & the printing and photos look very good (please, no more smeary xerox photozines!).

NOISE NOISE NOISE #2

% Kami, TOP-FM, Box 40146, Casuarina NT 0810 Australia \$2 U.S. postpaid

A clean-looking Australian punkzine out of an Aussy FM radio station, some nice layouts and graphics and some good interviews w/ little-known bands (Mass Appeal, King Snake Roost, and the more widely known feedtime). Not bad for \$2 since it must cost almost that much to mail it from Australia!

AESTHETICIDE #1 and #2 \$3 ppd

% Jody Trezil, Box 235, Taylor, MI 48180

Something a little different, this is all short stories, most on the weird side. The editor invites submissions from readers and includes a long survey to fill out & return.

THE VILLAGE NOIZE #6

48-54 213 St., Bayside, NY 11364 \$2 ppd

Nice color cover of Henry Rollins kicks off a much-improved issue of this NY/hc zine, with interviews w/ All, Underdog, Rollins, Schooly D, plus live & record reviews. Really going strong!

PSYCHIC SEX TURNIP #7

3706 Timberlake Rd., #101, Johnson City TN 37601 75 cents

Johnny Puke (ex-Stinky Finger) puts this out, with interviews, reviews, and caustic scene coverage of the Johnson City, Tenn. scene. This issue has Ludichrist, locals Teenage Love, but the live reviews are the best part.

TRUTH EFFORT #2

8 Bloomfield Dr., Mt. Holly, NJ 08060 SASE

Poetry, reviews, shows, zines; simple, clean layouts in small format. A good start.

DENSITY #2

% Jason, 15 Malaga Dr., Trenton, NJ 08618

Great cover, good mix of music with an emphasis on local punk & hardcore, with Youth of Today, the Blisters, and American Standard, plus the usual reviews, pix, art.

SONIC YOUTH, Daydream Nation double-lp (Blast First/Enigma)
PUSSY GALORE, "Sugarshit Sharp," EP (Caroline)

Noise Rock, Scum Rock, Pigfucker Rock.... Call it whatever, in 1988 it all started to sound a lot more like music.

Which is not to say that anyone sold out, or gave up, or cashed in, although some of the bands whose work seemed like the most ungodly uncommercial racket in the world just a year or two ago did okay for themselves. And nobody did any better than Sonic Youth, undisputed gods of the downtown "noise scene" and the best-selling band the genre has yet produced. Nobody made a better record in 1988 than Daydream Nation either.

Sonic Youth has never liked the label "noise band" - for obvious reasons, it's such a stupid, limiting label - but with Daydream Nation the band has rendered the term meaningless anyway. This double-lp, 12-track collection of songs has its moments of noise - brutal distorted maelstroms of sound and ear-bleeding feedback - but they're matched by moments of beauty so pure and clear - and all produced by guitars - as to rival church bells. It starts with "Teenage Riot," a power-pop melody and Thurston Moore's smiling vocals propelled by glistening harmonics and a punkadelic beat. Sound a bit like the band's much-vaunted heroes, the Ramones? Sure does, just like the next song, "Silver Rocket," squeals and shimmies like the Buzzcocks, just like Kim Gordon's vocals recall Patti Smith. This is a punk rock record, all right, just like Sister was punk rock. But Daydream Nation goes a bit further; it not only continues to direction toward structured "pop" songwriting begun on Evol and developed and Sister, but it incorporates the dissonant sonic jams of their earlier records as well. Nearly every "song" has a bridge that lets the guitars unleash layers of feedback and controlled distortion...but just when the song threatens to devolve into "noise," the melody and lyrics reassert themselves. It happens in the Radio Ethiopia-like journey of "The Sprawl" and the unashamedly Dylanesque "Eric's Trip" (which, in the midst of the most ear-grating din, has a guitar break that chimes like a cathedral carillon). "Total Trash" features one of those signature re-tuned guitars, a flattened, blatting, distorted rhythm guitar; check out how the band layers screeching feedback over it to form a natural bridge for the song, leading back into the catchy punk/rock verse.

Daydream Nation may have been born out of Sonic Youth's perverse love of touring; the songs are fun to hear and I'm sure fun to play, but more challenging than the fairly straightforward tunes on Sister - the kind of songs you can play night after night without growing bored. This is certainly a record you can hear again & again & again; its four sides, with 3 songs apiece, have a symmetry that make it nearly perfect. Every side is like a separate record, each with its share of melody, poetry, energy, and, yes, noise.

Even the scummiest of the pigfuck bands, Pussy Galore, seems a lot more musical on their new EP, "Sugarshit Sharp." By coupling recognizable (if not discernible) lyrics to hi-energy riffs and playing it all to a beat, the stuff on this record may still be "noisy" but it's a helluva lot closer to songs than anything the band has done before. Bob Bert's amazing bionic percussion - part metal, part drums; half human, half machine - is the real hero here, replacing the entire range of the traditional rhythm section - he's rhythm guitar, bass, and drums all in one. The guitars themselves are raw and distorted, played with unyielding energy and a dedication to primitivism that is this record's real triumph - this really sounds like a band that just picked up its guitars for the first time six months ago. Not bad for a combo that's been banging around for six years. Pussy Galore strips away the reverb, effects, and industrial gewgaws of most "noise rock," just as the Ramones filleted and deboned the overstuffed Rock of their day, giving "Sugarshit Sharp" the amphetaminized raw power of the most psychotic Stooges bootleg imaginable. Nobody has been this good as sounding this bad since the early Cramps.

Jim Testa

It's The End Of Noise As We Know It

The College Music Journal - like Cliff Notes or pocket calculators - was invented to help college students from having to learn how to think. CMJ solicits playlists from college radio stations, publishes those lists in their magazine, and subtly reinforces the stupid idea that because these are the most popular records, they're the ones college radio should be playing. This strategy ignores the purpose of college radio, which is, like college itself, to educate - educate not only students about how radio works, but to educate its audience about the alternative music that commercial radio won't play. That has nothing to do with making money, however, and so the role of college radio pretty much gets overlooked at the CMJ Convention. What you get instead is a lot of college students in New York (many of them for the first time) trying to have fun, and a lot of fat guys in bad suits named Lenny talking about "units" and "market share" and all the demographic voodoo that's ruined commercial radio in this country.

Thursday, 10 am - Check in time. No one is here yet but college jocks, and standing in line with a few hundred trendy 19 year olds I feel like I'm waiting to buy Camper Van Beethoven tickets. For some bizarre reason, CMJ has actually invited me to speak on the "Fanzine Panel" (Cosloy and Coley being otherwise engaged on other, assumedly more important panels) so I get a free ride to this shindig. Besides my CMJ badge, I get a 10 lb. shopping bag full of goodies - a total of 6 CD's, 16 cassettes, a few albums, and half a dozen magazines, ranging from The Ear to Rip to Rockpool.

The fanzine panel is composed of Peter from Chicago's Butt Rag, which turns out to be a lot like Jersey Beat - same circulation, same look, same sort of reviews and interviews. Peter's biggest contribution to the panel comes when he reveals that Pere Ubu refused to give him an interview because David Thomas' religious convictions were offended by the name Butt Rag. Mark Kramer from Shimmydisc Records asks a lot of pointed questions, and Mykel Board keeps saying that fanzines shouldn't review major label releases. We all argue a lot about what is and isn't a "fanzine," and Harris Pankin from Letch Patrol complains that none of us will interview him. A girl from Columbia, Missouri whines that no one at her school will read a fanzine or let her write about underground music on the school paper. Asked what she should do, I respond, "Transfer to NYU," and get my biggest laugh of the day. Well, okay, of the seminar. The other panels are all boring and irrelevant.

CMJ Convention Report

Thursday, 9:30 pm - On my way to CBGB, I stop at Sounds Records on St. Marks Place. Every CD in the CMJ freebie bag is already here on sale in the Used Bins. I run across Das Damen, who are hitting on the salesgirl and bragging about their upcoming European tour, which will include two weeks sharing a tour van with Angst. This is not my idea of a vacation. At CBGB, Texas Instruments prove way more punk rock and less Dylanesque than their tres' cool new lp, and the Dylanisms are delivered as if Neil Young were the only Dylan manque' who matters. Lazy Cowgirls throw in a manic thrash pop set, totally rockin' shit living up to the advanced hype I've heard about these guys. Although Das Damen and Bullet Lavolta are on next, I split for the Lismar Lounge, where Electric Love Muffin are having their usual NY luck - the "club" looks even more like an condemned Lebanese restaurant than usual, and the Muffin play a great set to a half dozen stalwart fans, including four friends who drove up from Philadelphia with them and a guy from their label. For the record, Friends Of The Family, a NY trio, turn in an okay set of Hendrixoid acid punk that I thought I'd hate. But they were definitely watchable.

DIARY OF A ROCK CRITTER

Jersey Beat Confidential

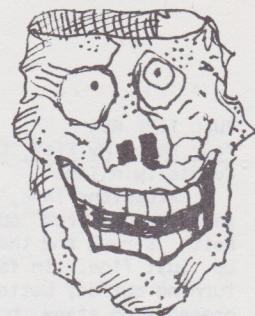


MUD HONEY



Mud Honey

DIARY OF A ROCK CRITTER



Friday, Oct. 28

All the panels today are stupid and irrelevant. I do a lot of shmoozing and sucking up to various label people, hoping to sell some ad space. No luck. Janet and Yvonne from Caroline turn out to be the best-looking and friendliest label people making the rounds. Laura Croteau from Rabid Cat convinces me to come visit Austin for the South By Southwest music convention next Spring. Some guys from True Rumor thank me for the review of their record. Lots of bands hand me cassettes. Oh boy, just what I need.

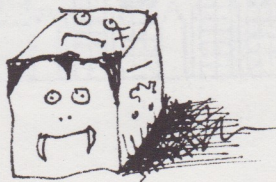
10:30 pm

Maxwells is having folkie night. The new Yo La Tengo do their acoustic thing, Georgia and Ira standing in front of two mikes, Georgia with a snare & cymbal, Ira with acoustic guitar, and croon two-part harmony doo wop and Modern Lover-type rock 'n roll. It is surprisingly wonderful - the trick with Yo La Tengo is that they always turn out to be a whole lot better than you expect. I wonder what drug Ira had to feed Georgia to get her to stand in front of a stage and sing like that. They do "Rama Lama Ding Dong" and it rules. They also do Chuck Barris' immortal "Palisades Park," which reminds me of those cool basement jams at Ira's house years ago after softball. Chris Stamey and Peter Holsapple do their Simon & Garfunkel bit, debuting quite a bit of new material. The Holsapple songs are tart and tightly written, breathtakingly inventive, full of eartingling melodies and unexpected changes; a world above the hackneyed shlock on The Sound Of Music. Stamey retains the high form he showed on It's Alright, and those two voices sound very, very good together. They do Stamey's "Cara Lee" and Holsapple's "Darby Hall," and even a few golden classics from the dB's days - "Big Brown Eyes," "Happenstance." The new songs from both writers seem so obviously written and arranged for two voices that I wonder if maybe they're contemplating an lp together. It might be the key to giving two careers a much-needed push.

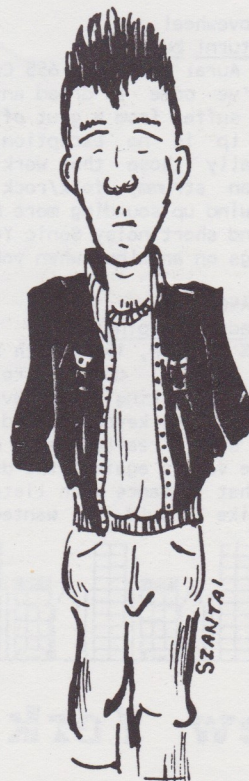
Saturday

I spend a lot of time at the Metal Maraton today, a special series of panels devoted to heavy metal music. Unlike the label heavies and journalists at the regular CMJ confab, the metal people are all warm, funny, self-deprecating, and entertaining. Out in the hall, Regina Joskow congratulates me for being the first writer to hype the Alter Boys. She lives with Ira Robbins, the founder of Trouser Press, whom I gush to unashamedly for a few minutes. More bands give me cassettes. Virgin Records has two members of That Petrol Emotion at their booth to sign autographs and do station id's, a favorite pasttime of post-adolescent deejays with tape recorders who find themselves anywhere in the vicinity of celebrities. I try desperately to meet ex-Undertone Damian O'Neill, but don't get introduced.

Saturday night back at Maxwells, Urge Overkill show up in black clothes and do a rough-hewn power-punk set that doesn't ring many bells. They're followed by the much-ballyhooed Mud Honey, another of those Seattle bands from Sub-Pop Records. Uglier and angrier than the Doughboys, whom they somewhat resemble, these four skinny, longhaired dudes blister the paint off Steve Fallon's newly-refurbished ceiling, inspiring the front of the pit to acts of criminal assault. Their lead singer takes not one but two kamikaze leaps onto the frantically moshing backs in the front row, and we all leave thinking we've witnessed the second coming of the Stooges, or something.



by Jim Testa



FULL TIME MEN

Your Face, My Fist, LP
Coyote/Twin/Tone

Fleshtone fans, fear not. God knows when we'll get a new LP's worth of garagearama from our heroes, but this lp - which is basically guitarist Keith Streng and the rest of the 'tones minus frontman Peter Zaremba - will do just fine. In fact, it's hard to imagine a bona fide Fleshtones album turning out any better. Streng may not be able to match Zaremba's energy and presence on stage, but he's more than his match in the studio, as these cuts attest - they're fast, fun, throttling garagey rock 'n' rollin', with all the stompin' chantin' flat-out full-bore frenzy of the Fleshtones at their best. The lp includes cuts from the 1986 "Full Time Men" EP (cut with Peter Buck down in Athens), the Big Bang Theory compilation cuts from last year, and even a new version of an old Fleshtones B-side, but hey, those are the best songs anyway (the wildly wiggled-out "I Got Wheels" with Buck, the wonderfully fuck-you-Nancy-Reagan garage-rock anthem "High On Drugs," and the nearly-forgotten "Critical List"). Buy this and dig.

CHEAPSKATES

It Wings Above, LP

Music Maniac Records - German import

Shane Faubert was my pick as the most talented songwriter on the scene, back in the good ol' days of the NY Garage Revival. Nowadays, his band The Cheapskates is a stripped-down trio with a purer pop sound than the paisley'd days of yore, but Faubert's distinctively mellow vocals and nimble pen are still turning out some of the best music in New York City. It hurts that this record had to be released in Germany; if it's any comfort, similar talents like Alex Chilton and John Felice suffered the same fate for years. But hey, check these tunes out - Faubert & Co. can write 'em as catchy and endearingly innocent as the best of Boyce & Hart, they're not afraid to be sentimental, and the production here - from Hoboken's Water Music, natch - has the warm, ringy, bright tones of the best American pop-rock (Easter, Game Theory, Stamey, you name it). Pray somebody releases this stateside soon!

TONEBENDERS

"Coin Toss," EP

PO Box 5156, Hoboken, NJ 07030

The debut of the year? Sure sounds like it. Four classic cuts of pure pop with just enough groovy 6T's filigree to make 'em glow in the dark. Like a bunch of way cool pop combos of years past (early dB's, early Dumptruck), the Tonebenders feature two guys with divergent styles writing and singing lead, guitarists Doug Davie and Mike Corcoran. "I Gotta Run" and "Take Away Jensen" by Corcoran are the kind of song I like to play first thing in the morning - wake up music, energetic and sun-bright. Davie's "Freight Train" plays off folk/rock poetics but with the same attention to melody and brio as Corcoran's tunes. These guys play a lot of club dates, check them out.

hypnolovewheel

turn! turn! burn! LP

Fabian Aural Products, 655 Carroll St., Brooklyn, NY 11215

I've come to dread anything produced by Albert Garzon - his records always suffer from a glut of ideas and self-indulgence, and hypnolovewheel's first lp is no exception. There are some songs here that do work - especially those that work off the band's trippy name and incorporate a Byrdsian strummy folk/rock sound with a acid-damaged psychedelic streak, which wind up sounding more modern than neo-60's. But there are long noisy jams and short noisy Sonic Youth excursions that don't work at all. Why put 13 songs on an album when you've only written 7 or 8 good ones?

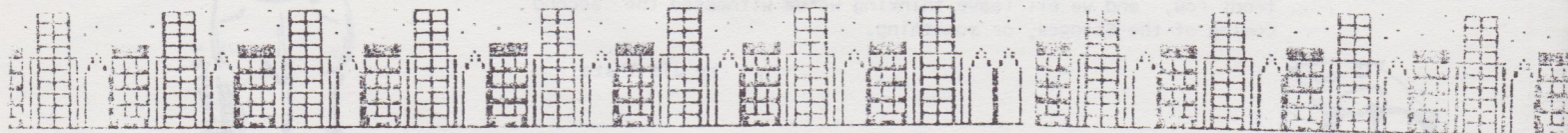
MASS TANGO

Our Heads Our Spinning, LP

Ohio, % Arktype, 154 E. 7th St., New York, NY 10009

This, I don't like much. Sarah Bell's monotone vocals and Ken Cushman's Talking Heads-Revisited new-wavey affectations turn me off, and all the synth keyboards and turgid tempos are a drag. The slow, pretty tunes aren't really pretty enough to hold my interest, and the fast tunes set the vocals against the drum rhythms, making them jerky and undanceable. Not that I dance much listening to records these days...but it's nice to feel like I could if I wanted to.

*Jerry came to
the ultimate conclusion
that he had consumed
enough mood altering
inhalants for the day*



New York Scene Report

Jim Testa

GREGORY'S FUNHOUSE

Obey, LP

Big Chief/ILA, 611 Broadway, #907E, NYC

Who is Gregory? Who is this band? What is this record? Okay, one thing at a time. Gregory is the lead singer & songwriter. His booming voice is electronically distorted (slowed down, I think) so that he sounds like the Jolly Green Giant...assuming the Jolly Green Giant lived on the sleazier end of Hollywood Blvd.

SCREECHING WEASEL

Boogada Boogada Boogada, LP

Roadkill, Box 37, Prospect Hts, IL 60070

After a hard day of reviewing Daydream Nation or interpreting the lyrics on the new R.E.M. album, what do we rock critics like to do for fun? Why, just what you plain folks do...kick off our shoes, throw a Screeching Weasel record on the ol' Victrola, and just sit back & enjoy. Forget the singer/songwriter Ben Weasel writes for this mag, or that I'm friends with the other guy who runs this label. Let's just be objective and honest: This is great. Funny fast thrashy punky, 27 songs that whizz by faster'n a day at Disney World. Ransacking pop culture for catchy riffs & inspired couplets, they trash everything from the Ramones to surf-rock to tv theme songs. Lots of songs about girls too, so you can tell they're a midwest Hardcore band and not from NY (where the boys just write songs about their buddies in the pit). Pick Hits: "Hey Suburbia," "This Ain't Hawaii," and the classic "I Hate Led Zeppelin." And just to prove who's really punk rock, it comes with two - count 'em - two lyric sheets and a limited edition nude bowling poster. Buy this today. That's an order.

HAPPY WORLD

Chinatown, LP

Rabid Cat, Box 49263, Austin, TX 78765

Not was wired or weird as last year's Flowing Field, Happy World's new 7-song lp is just solid, razor-edged punk, with a biting fuzzed guitar and yowling vocals, backed by the best rhythm section this side of Scratch Acid (excuse me, Rapeman). There's an intense sexual thing bubbling under in almost all these lyrics; you get the feeling this band got real horny since they moved to San Francisco. The tension slices its way through the thick syrupy guitar noise, the tempo changes and the chords, erupting orgasmically as song's end. Chinatown won't just rock you; it'll make you wet.

RATTAIL GRENADIER

Rattail Grenadier, LP

Roadkill

Lafayette, Indiana's Rattail Grenadier slices your brain with a buzzsaw guitar sound and then dices what's left with Steve Best's vocals, exploding with adolescent anger, angst, and resentment. They may just be the hottest new HC quartet west of Clifton, NJ. Lyrics deal with with a wild array of original ideas, uniquely homegrown; there's a song about the wild nightlife back in Lafayette ("kicking a dog/watching a goose/get your thrills watching corn reproduce") and an even better one about what to ask for when you sell your soul to Satan ("Eternal life?/that's a bore/that's not what I'm asking for/Fame and fortune and all that stuff?/I'm in Rattail/that's enough!"). Blistering guitar provides stinging leads throughout. A hot debut.

(above reviews by Jim Testa)

THE SYNDICATE OF SOUND, LP

Performance, PO Box 156, New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Thanks to major label greed, a great deal of lesser known 60's garage/punk lp's will never again be re-released in this supposed land of opportunity. Luckily for us collectors, import companies are smart enough to license some of these gems. Although they're more expensive as imports, they often sound much better than unfortunate recycled major label vinyl. Only a handful of domestic labels have had the courage, capital, and foresight to keep some of these historic relics in circulation, before they disappear forever.

Performance Records in New Brunswick is one such labor of love, run by devoted fans of musical obscurity - Steve Kaplan and Artie Marko. Performance is mainly a large cut-out (remaindered) distributor that services record stores throughout the U.S., finding and distributing obscure and inexpensive lp's, cassettes, CD's, and even magazines. Going to this place is like entering Heaven for me; besides searching for treasures, it's always a gas talking at length with Steve about music that only diehards know about.

Performance, the label, has released records as diverse as early LP's by Dust (hard rock trio with pre-Ramones Marky), Captain Beefheart (Mirror Man), a Nico compilation, and even weird nostalgia stuff like the Addams Family's record or Charlie Manson's infamous Lie lp. Recommended is their most successful compilation of various New Brunswick area bands covering 60's classics, called The 60's East Coast Rock N Roll Experiment. A pretty impressive track record.

Instead of merely re-releasing 3 lp's by the Music Explosion, Starz, and The Syndicate of Sound, Performance really did their homework and put together cool compilations of album tracks, singles, and even unreleased demos, with upwards of 16 cuts per album. They avoided the clinkers and fillers that made up much of 60's album rock (when the industry was still dominated by singles) and unearthed a much better representation of material. Although I haven't heard the Starz lp yet, the Music Explosion one is definitely worth owning.

The most recent lp is by The Syndicate of Sound, and it's Performance's best release yet. I didn't expect much from these one-hit wonders from San Jose, California, but boy, was I wrong! Each of the 16 cuts on the lp is fine, with 10 originals and six covers, and there's certainly more edge than one would expect from knowing their '66 classic, "Little Girl." I remember buying that single when it came out, and it still sounds as refreshingly smug 'n nasty as it ever did. A similar attitude toward unsavory women is found on several of these tracks, esp. the humorous "Get Outta My Life, Woman."

There's a ton of nifty fuzztone & 12-string guitar buzz here for 60's garage rock freaks, even some nasty-toned bluesy lead guitar. And Performance has remastered all the tracks, providing better clarity than the originals. This plus excellent liner notes detailing the 4-year history of the band represented on the album make this a collector's dream.

If the major labels had any sense of responsibility (or history), they'd be doing this kind of work. But fat chance. So support Performance Records.

- Bruce Gallanter

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THE FEELIES
Only Life, LP
Coyote/A&M

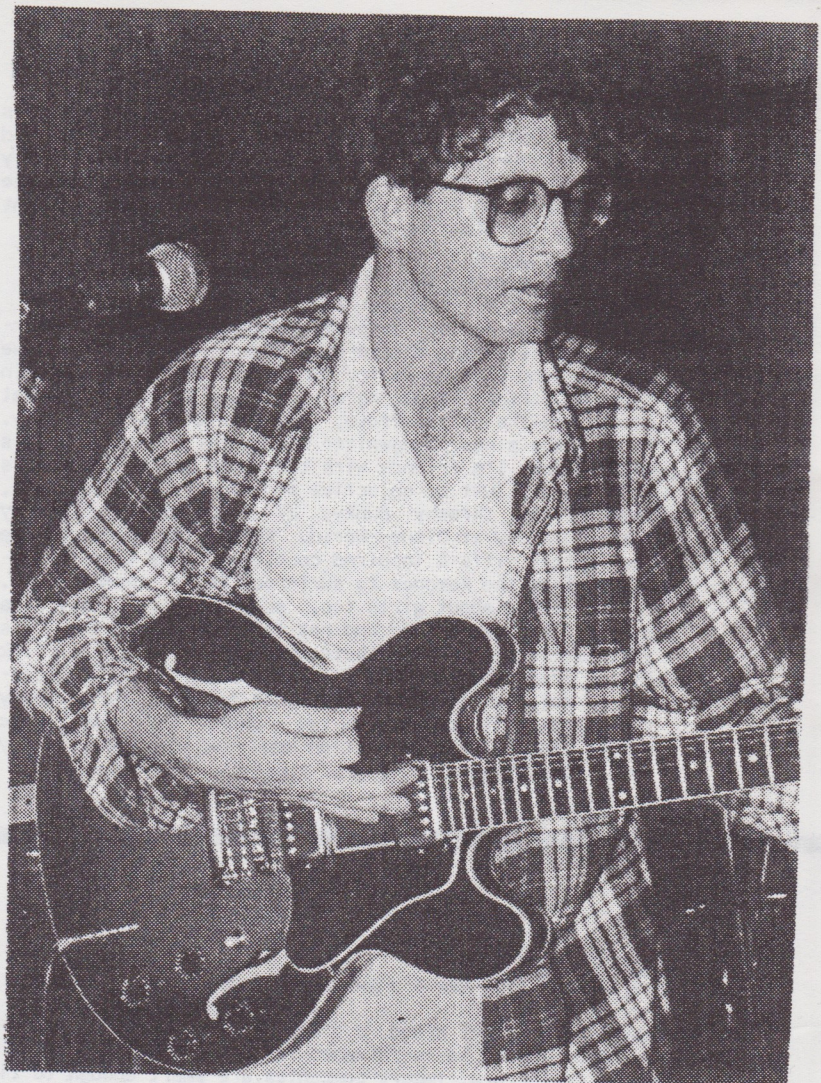
"Sheesh, Jim, by the time your readers get the next issue, four months will have passed since the record's well-publicized release. You sure you want this reviewed?"

"All I know is, any publication called Jersey Beat ought to have a review of any record by the Feelies."

So it was that your humble narrator was pressed into service, just in case you wondered. Like you, I've already come across many interviews, reviews, etc... they even made the cover of the wretched E.C. Rocker and two tracks were in the running for WDRE's "Shriek of the Week" competition. Much was made of their soundtrack work in the years between this and their first wide-release lp, 1980's *Crazy Rhythms*. Some folks mentioned (without due irony) their appearance in the movie "Something Wild." Perhaps this is the time to ask, "How much was individual merit, and how much was Jonathon Demme's patronage, responsible for all the fuss?"

I'll have to give the edge to the former. The flip side of our homeboys' *raison d'être* is that if it's too much of a hassle, they won't bother, so the tracks here have a tossed-off quality. Million and Mercer don't exactly think "Hook" when they record a song; as you'd expect, there's a familiar ring to almost every track. But there's an evolution from their earlier work; the arrangements are much tighter, the singing clearer, the rhythms saner. The evolution leads to a sound that's very much akin to the third Velvet Underground lp, and as if to say, "Yeah, wanna make something of it?" the Feelies finish this collection by covering "What Goes On."

Hard to tell where the Feelies are going to take their sound from here. But even a hook as subliminal as the one in "Only Life" whets your appetite for more; you still ant to listen for the next installment. And if it's another few years... wanna make something of it? I can count on the fingers of one hand the listenable bands who've kept their integrity while getting their share of the spotlight. For that we should give thanks. And continue to buy their records. - Dirk Bender



(photo: Andy Peters)

The Writers Rock Out!

ZINEAGE

The Jersey Beat Compilation, Volume 4

OPTION
MAGAZINE

ZINEAGE: The Jersey Beat Compilation Vol. 4
The idea behind this cassette (and a brilliant one at that) was to build a compilation of songs by bands that have at least one fanzine editor in them. Not coincidentally, the tape was compiled by a fanzine. Imagine, on this tape you can hear Howard Wuelfing (*Discords, Forced Exposure*, etc.), Jim DeRogatis (*Reasons For Living*), Chris Francz (*Damaged*), Jeff Fox (*Maximum Rock'n'Roll*), and several others play the music they like. If you keep up with zinedom, this is better than true confessions. Problem is that, if you don't know much about zines, this is only a moderately engaging compilation. Some of the songs are terrific (Ex-Lion Tamers, Love Pushers, Balloon Squad), but all too often the songs are combo snippets of punk clichés. Still, this is a lot of fun for anyone who likes obscure, underground punk bands, reads any one or several of the fanzines represented, or hates critics and would love to hear (and rip on) just how bad some of the bands are. (Jersey Beat, 418 Gregory Ave., Weehawken, NJ 07087) — Steve Jones

V/A - "Zineage" cassette

This sampler comes to us from Jersey Beat fanzine. Featured are 14 bands each contributing one song. Some to note are **SCREECHING WEASEL**, **SLUGFEST**, **IMPETIGO**. Varied styles from poppy punk to HC. (RG) (Jersey Beat, 418 Gregory Ave., Weehawken, NJ 07087)

MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL

FLIPSIDE

VARIOUS

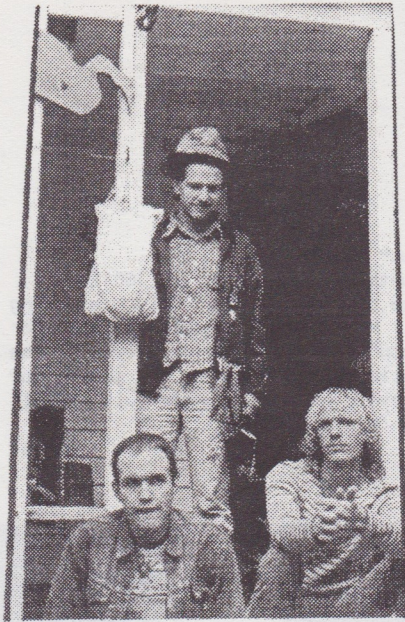
Zineage: the Jersey Beat Comp. Cassette

A superbly put together compilation of music - ranging from industrial to punk to pop to garage to whathave you - and spoken word stuff from fanzine rock crit types, courtesy of Jim Testa. Plenty of good stuff here: Jeff Fox's 'Dead End Kids,' Uncle Bob Touched Me's 'Down In the Basement,' Husker Du and Misfits covers from *Ballon Squad* and *Mod Fun*, cool spoken word stuff from Donny the Punk and OPEC Sid and the Fiendz' 'Don't Point.' Recommended. - Mike Snider
Jersey Beat 418 Gregory Ave.
Weehawken NJ 07087

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Music By People Who Write About Music



CHICKEN SCRATCH

Pass The Porcupine, LP

Comm 3 (416 E. 13 St., NY, NY 10009)

Definitely a first effort. Some good ideas, some half-baked. A bit too R.E.M./FIREHOSE-like in both the vocal & instrumental departments. The big question is - if your voice happens to sound like Mike Stipe or Ed from Ohio, should you avoid writing/playing songs in the same vein? Hmm. This aspect is most unexpected, since I recall checking out the Corporate Pigs, a local hardcore unit, at the Court Tavern eons ago, with two of these dudes aboard: Kevin Kelly (lead gtr) and Paul Myska (bass). Also, oddly enough, Kelly was on one of my favorite industrial-noise cassette-only releases, NJ's Brain Vacation. This is drummer Chuck O'Connell's first band, although you can't tell from listening.

Many of these tunes have that herky jerky white funk coolness that bands like FIREHOSE always succeed with. Chicken Scratch do a good job as well, altho it takes more time until this becomes second nature. Genre-hopping is also an effective 80's type of behavior which takes practice to pull off completely. What works best for me on their debut release are those tunes which are most removed from the aforementioned popular bands; establishing their own identity should be Chicken Scratch's first priority, and the tunes that do this best are "Mumbling About Ducks," "Mooncrawl," and "Three Blind Mice." "Mumbling..." is a quirky (mostly) instrumental, with an unexpectedly unique midsection of layered mumbled vocals and piano rambling, courtesy of hip producer Albert Garzon. Insect-like electronics buzz throughout "Mooncrawl," a nice trick. Another more subtle vibe is their version of the age-old children's rhyme "Three Blind Mice," which begins & ends with a free-floating atmosphere of twinkling piano & gtr, as well as a spongelike el. bass. The hypnotic wash of instrumental swirling on the outro is most well done. Talented players and producer here, no doubt, showing much promise. Time to establish their own sound, though. Upcoming live gigs should prove interesting.

gallanter's sonic grooves



THE STRIPMINERS Mini-lp

Comm 3 Records, 416 E. 13th St., #12, New York, NY 10009

Although Rochester is pretty far north in New York State, I've been noticing more & more bands coming from that town in recent years. Besides college darlings 10,000 Maniacs, there was the equally cool Absolute Grey, garage greats Chesterfield Kings, as well as a newer REMish unit worth checking out called Paper Train. Yet none of the aforementioned units prepare us for the 7-song stunner 1st release by the Stripminers.

Everything about this record works just right, from the cover art (a machine gun-toting worm and a larger-than-life solemn crow) to the disorienting woodblock on the back. The record is well thought out, building with each song to a riveting, draining climax in the final 3 pieces. The first side doesn't really prepare us for what lies ahead.

In the past few years, we've seen a number of bands whose guitarists provide layers of sonic textures. From the Feelies to Dinosaur Jr., one extreme to the other, guitars are buzzing new environments. The Stripminers fit into the thicker regions of this spectrum; although not as dense as Dinosaur's overwhelming mass, they are equally powerful on their own terms.

The opening tune, "Please Chief," reminds me of early Gutbank, with its opening & closing massive uptempo rocking out, and perfectly slowed-down chorus. Strong singing throughout this ep is another plus. "Moleman" has that grandiose, nicely overblown early Live Skull type of romp. Whoa!

The intense final trilogy of tunes begins with "Certain Things," as we are slowly lowered into the eye of the hurricane. It is dirge-like, the molasses slowly oozing down, the desperate voice being drained of all energy. I dig the way the flow continues throughout; altho the drums speed up, nothing else does. Similar to the crashing of waves upon our bodies. "Sheep Killin' Dog" is a further descent into the storm of emotional upheaval - it's a smoking instrumental worth of the Minutemen's uplifting/devastating wall of sound. Pretty fucking scary!! A stunning explosion of sound & singing covers us all during the final descent of the closer, "Last Time, Again." The ultimate climax comes at the beginning of the piece, strangely enough, leaving everything after it shattered and falling apart as it winds down to complete nothingness. Stand up & cheer! We hope this band makes it to our area very soon.



SFA

"New York" EP

Noo Yawk, 12 St. James Pl., Bklyn 11205

Mike Bullshit, editor of Bullshit Monthly and one of the few skinheads in New York with a sense of humor, fronts SFA on stage and leads the band through half of this 9-song, 7" EP. The best songs here, "Gyroscope" and "Journey," feature doubled vocals by Mike and Brendan and a big, ballsy Oi! sound. Lyrically, the band's above average (esp for the current NYC/HC scene) as far as originality goes, and throws in a bit of humor with the AOD-ish "Finast" (about the joys of supermarketing, done at hyperthrash tempo) and the rampantly anti-intellectual "95 Average" (which puts down all those nerdy kids with good grades in school).

- J.T.

VISION

"Undiscovered" 7"

New Scene, 701 Meadow Rd., Bridgewater, NJ 08807

I do have one gripe about this band, and that's their attitude. I got to see them live and they think too much of themselves and act like some elite hardcore band. But this is a pretty good 7", reminding me of Dag Nasty ("Falling Apart") mixed with Verbal Assault (second side). Their material does come across better live. Another annoying thing is that just above every song breaks into a bass riff at some point, which becomes repetitious and boring. Pretty good lyrics considering the amount of positive bands there are around. Not bad.

- Tom Angelli

EVEN WORSE

"Leaving"/"One Night Stand"

Autonomy, 249 Eldridge St., #14, NYC 10002

As much as I like and admire Jack Rabid as a writer & zine editor, I was never much of an Even Worse fan back in the early '80's. Jack did have good taste in bandmates though, as this posthumously released 45 reveals, since one version of Even Worse (they changed members more than Youth of Today) featured Thurston Moore (moonlighting from his then brand-new "noise" band, Sonic Youth) and Hugo Largo bassist Tim Sommer (who in those days dj'd NYC's coolest all-hardcore radio program, WNYU's "Noise: The Show"). As for this record, the A-side is an untypical ballad sung by Jack, with a pretty melody ("music with heart," Jack?), while the b-side is a generic (for the period) thrash piece, with some funny crowd noises ("You suck sooooo bad!!!") recorded live at Great Gildersleeves. A memento of NYC's early hc scene, true, and obviously of interest to Sonic Youth collector-types, but that's about it.

- J.T.

WARZONE

Open Your Eyes, LP

Caroline

NYC's oldest skinhead band returns with their 2nd lp (their first recorded for Caroline) with great production and the usual message songs about friendship, unity, and positive personal values. While it's hard to take Warzone's brand of up-with-people hardcore seriously after Crucial Youth, I give lead singer Raybies and Warzone's extended "family" a lot of credit for New York's generally laudable skinhead community. Compared to the neo-fascist, violent assholes in Philly and Trenton, the kids who flock to Warzone's shows are model youth. And I can think of worse topics for songs than staying in school and decrying racism. Musically, Open Your Eyes is the same old Oi-influenced mosh & grind, with much better production than Warzone's earlier records. Maybe they're not as catchy as Skewdriver, but I'd much rather have Warzone and their fans as part of my scene.

- J.T.

WOLFSBANE

"Wasted But Dangerous" EP

Bad Moon, 298 Elizabeth St., New York, NY 10012

The band's dose of humor is the only redeeming quality of this EP. Mix vocals by David Lee Roth or other commercial "pop" metal singers with even worse commercial metal music and if you like the idea, buy this. For fans, they're now recording a full lp with Rick Rubin. For me, this is shit.

- Tom A.



MIKE RIOT - SFA

**HARD CORE
PUNK**

FUGAZI

"Fugazi" EP

Dischord, 3819 Beecher St. NW, Washington DC 20009
Comprised of members of Happy Go Licky and Embrace, this is one of 1988's best releases. A conglomeration of different musical styles brought together for a really distinctive sound. Plus Ian MacKaye and Guy both take turns singing, which makes things interesting and impossible to pigeonhole. Something here for everyone and something not to be missed. And if you have a chance to see them live, do it!

- Tom A.

THE VIPERS

How About Some More?, LP

Midnight

Remember garage rock? No, not the 60s kind, but the 80s rehash. It was pretty boring, no matter how much energy its performers tried to inject. While the underground rock scene continues to alternate between bursts of enthusiasm and stretches of ennui, it may bear reviewing how quickly we let this particular "neo" category pass us by, and try to remember what the Dive looked like...

Or, we could just listen to the new Vipers record for what it is, a not-bad collection of gritty uptempo blues-tinged rockers. I was prepared to hate it because "garage rock" tends to have all the authenticity of Pee-Wee's claim that he "meant to do it" this way when you know damn well they're fuckups who can't do it any better...but after a couple listens it fits in nicely with that 1966 Stones album you thought you might have heard way back when. The Vipers aren't trying very hard here; on a recent WNYU show they admitted to using canned audience noises for their "live" track, recorded in a rehearsal basement. The performances are just sloppy enough to keep them out of the mainstream, but nobody seems to care much. Just another indie LP, filed already. Some more? No, thanks anyway.

- Dirk Bender

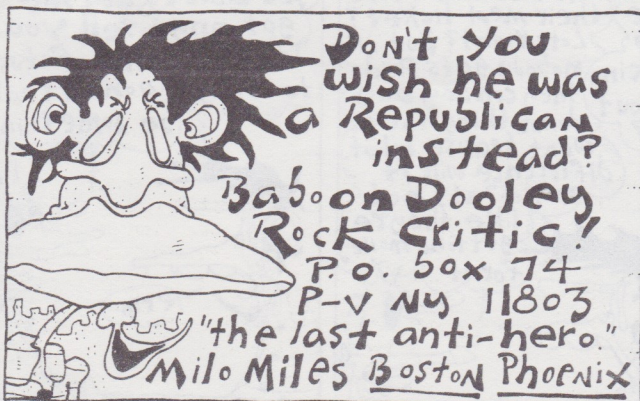
CARRY NATION

"A Temple Made For No One"/"I Can't Believe That Was Me" Hatchet Records, 21 1st Ave., #5, NYC 10003

Back in '84, two other JB writers and myself had the good fortune to discover a relatively unknown but nonetheless amazing rock quintet from Westfield called Animation. And boy, did they know our sox off, even at the Jetty [the most miserable venue in the history of r'n'r-Ed.] They already had released an excellent 12" but, as is often the case, broke up within a year, before getting a chance to finish their second recording. Word is that 3 of them have moved to Colorado, while lead guitarist John Rokosny guested on the first Smitherens lp, tried out for a number of other bands, and moved to NYC.

Four years later, John has finally assembled another quintet worthy of his talents. Carry Nation is their name and they feature the superb talents/harmonies of two women, Allison Bennett (on violin) and Beth McCormack (flute), as well as Simon Archambault (bass) and Dave Keay (drums). This debut 7" is a real delight. The A Side, "A Temple...", has an excellent balance of smokey female vocals and higher harmonies in the background. There's a most effective brooding quality, not that far removed from three other favorite bands of mine - Tiny Lights, Absolute Grey, and Downy Mildew. John's majestic ringing acoustic guitars and nimble raga rock riffs are enchanting throughout. There's a long instrumental break combining electric gtr and violin into a slow but perfectly timed climax. The flip, "I Can't Believe That Was Me," is more serene, and sounds as if it would have been a big hit during the 'groovy' folk/pop days of the mid '60's. Once again, there's a melancholy beauty to the vocals and melody. I dig the way that cerebral Feelies-like strumming kicks in mid-song at just the right moment. All in all, an impressive first effort; I look forward to their live performances and upcoming cassette release.

- Bruce Lee Gallanter



MOD LANG

Where Your Heart, EP

Certain

This record is not recommended for those who have not yet tried to grow up. It's a little like marital sex--dependable, there when you need it, and--yup--routine. Sure, it's much better than the remaining 95% of life, so you stick with it for the time being. But rock's about cheatin', ain't it? Not necessarily, Mod Lang seem to say. Even though cheating figures in their lyrics, infidelity and heartbreak seem to be factored into more complex stuff. Like, just where is your heart?

So why on earth would you want to listen to this... ordinary pop? Once you've awakened (preferably alone) from another nightclubbing excursion, wiped away the eye grit and started thinking with the benefit of sobriety, somehow the same old rock logic won't do. Sometimes you have to try listening to adults for kindred feelings, feelings which Mod Lang have in abundance. The music soothes, empathizes, and heals. They wear their heart on their sleeve, but it's a real heart, throbbing away, as this threesome ponders heartbreak with a glistening 4/4 pop sound. And it works; you can imagine that in conversation these three make a habit of finishing each other's sentences when one gets tongue-tied.

- Dirk B.

RICHARD X. HEYMAN

Living Room, LP

N.R. World Records

Heyman is the kind of guy you don't want to knock, simply because he knocked himself out to make this self-produced, self-released record. Problem is, he tends to make you aware of his labor all too often. This is mostly a one-man-multitracked-band effort, with Heyman doing the drumming, bass, guitars, and singing; there's just an occasional guest popping in here and there. He does a Latin-flavored number and a skiffle, but beyond that it's 12 tracks of Stamey-esque pop. And there's the problem. No one track is particularly bad; you might tap your toes and even sing along. But it wears quickly. For all the work, it still comes off like a decent-sounding demo, and you wonder how he'd do with a bigger budget and heavier hands lent in support.

- Dirk B.

FEARLESS IRANIANS FROM HELL

Holy War, LP

Boner, Box 2081, Berkeley, CA 94702

Something to be avoided by the weak. Both the lyrics and music have an 'in your face' approach that doesn't stop. They offend on both sides of the coin, but if you're into reading the lyrics, some are really good. The drumming is hot, the guitars have some potent power chords, and the singer release his anger till no end. FIHF are a grueling mix of hardcore with a pinch of thrash, with an approach that reminds me of Labelmated MDC.

- Tom A.

LOCAL TUNEAGE

HALF A CHICKEN
Food For Thought, LP
Rabid Cat

Forget the production credited to Bob Mould (and say a little thank you, Husker Du's records all sounded like shit anyway). Pt. Washington, NY's Half A Chicken really owe their sound to their studio, Hoboken's Water Music; their best cuts have the same warm, ringy tones of the post-Rocker Hoboken pop scene. At their best, Half A Chicken, with twangy guitar textures, intertwining vocals, fluid mid-tempo melodies and a slight countryish twist, sound a bit like early R.E.M. or old Rank And File records, which is just fine. When they go astray, it's when they venture into other genres - the awful, forced white funk of "Chicken Scratch," for instance, or the extended psychedelic wigout, "On My Way," which takes a long time to go absolutely nowhere. Most of this lp stands up just fine to contemporary college-radio pop, though, and it's worlds above the band's earlier demo. Keep an eye peeled for these guys.

- Jim T.

KRACKHOUSE
The Whole Truth, LP
Shimmydisc

Krackhouse indulge in a whole-hearted spazz-out that brings warm, salty tears to my blue-bagged eye sockets. Normally, these kinda stylistic projectile-vomit launches are used as cheap window dressing for scanty compositional ideation. Easy sensationalism. Shock-shlock. Not so easy to lay it out clean & pure, and have it hold cohere and not evaporate in the harsh light o' reason ('specially reason accustomed to rigid structuralism). So huzzah to Krackhouse for erecting this lounge rock from a parallel universe. Shoo-bop a wham zam.

- Howard W.

CROSSFIRE CHOIR
Back To The Wall, LP
Track Records

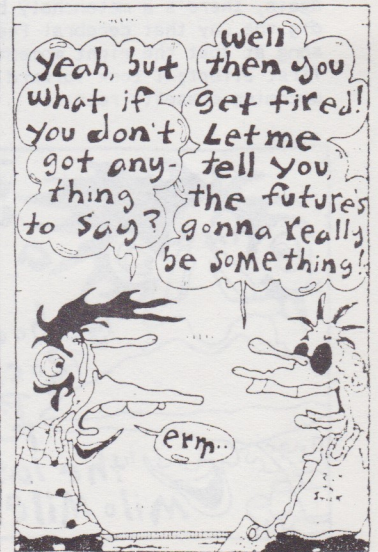
You can't lay any sort of "sellout" label on Crossfire Choir; from the start, they've made it perfectly clear that their only musical goal in life was to sell a million records. Here they're back (after their disastrous shot at the Big Time with Geffen) with Ed Stasium at the controls, providing his patented arena-rock lite-metal production to songs that are every bit as unoriginal, soundalike, overproduced, and predictable as the best of the MTV megastars. The sound that makes 14-year olds salivate has rarely been done any better; Bon Jovi, Def Leppard, Whitesnake, watch out. Now...is anybody buying?

- Jim T.

NOVA
Another Song Of Life, LP
Indigo

One of those NY bands no one's ever heard of that was being heavily touted at CMJ. Nova's "new romantic" swill lacks the freshness of pop, the energy of dance music, or any originality whatsoever. The overwrought sexy guy vocals of Tommy Curan are almost a match for Rick Astley's baritone lumpiness, and Michael Sloane manages to make his every drumbeat sound like it came out of a beatbox. I predict big things.

- Jim T.



FORTHRIGHT - Demo c/o Steve Saranga, 1252 Treeline Dr., Allentown, PA 18103 Yet another "positive" hc band, and while the music here rocks hard, fast, and tight, I've had it with these all these bands writing the same songs over & over & over - the going thru changes song, the "positive energy" song, and my favorite, the one about the fucked-up friend you have to leave behind because you're straight-edge and he's not. When is one of these SE posi-bands gonna come up with an original idea for a lyric - or even just write a song about their girlfriends??

BILL POPP & THE TAPES Demo 22-18 121st St., College Pt., NY 11356 My dad keeps his car radio tuned to Lite FM 106, which is the only other place I get to hear this sort of characterless saccharine popmuzak.

THE THING Six Sick Songs EP - An up'n coming scum band with surprising complexity shot thru their tunes - Feeliesque rhythms, weird atonal guitar riffs with haunting fuzz/rhythm accompaniment; the doubled vocals on "Dissolve" are actually scary, and Jesse Ostbaum's vocals are at least twice as scummy as the Reverb Motherfuckers.

INCH BY INCH The Rulers of Rock - 70's fun punk - Dolls, MC5, Stones, Stooges, y'know... Cleaner & poppier than the Seattle grunge bands or The Fluid, all of whom are getting a lot of ink these days for this top of rockin'. Too bad this version of the band is kaput, but singer/gtr Paul Contino definitely has my ear when he puts together his next combo.

Demos

BLEBS - MTV Superstar

This is the Blebs' 2nd lp-length tape, and not just your standard mockcore goof. There's the obligatory poke at rap, a lot of clever effects and some freewheelin' sonic improv, and an imaginative mix of styles, speeds, and jokes. The muddy sound is my only complaint.

SADISTIC SEX - What A Waste of A Beautiful Day (Box 282, Manville, NJ 08835) Ex-Negative Youth members' 2nd demo, about half of which is dedicated to songs that live up to their name. "We're not metal, just heavy," says singer/bassist Eric Delusion. Ok. There's a definite art-rock/psychedelic influence (the band cites Syd Barrett as a god) which adds another dimension to the post-crossover speedmetal trappings; to wit, "Sploobie, Sploobie, toke the herb/free and flying like a bird." The band also says they've outgrown the rape/bondage/sadism lyrics, which is nice to hear.

THRASH HOLD Eyes Of The Owl (15-0 Parkwood Drive, So.Amboy, NJ 08879) Another thrash trio, with a bright, clean sound, meaty masculine vocals, and some nifty touches, like the nuclear air raid that opens the tape. Topics include the apocalypse, teenage suicide, and some mystical claptrap about a man who can fly and see in the dark like owls, but the touch of satanmetal doesn't seem all that offensive, and the rhythm team here can rock. Nice leadwork from singer/guitarist Nowell Herman too.

THE SIX AND VIOLENCE - demo Six tunes from a forthcoming lp from one of the hottest bands on the CBGB matinee circuit, kinda like A.O.D. meets Murphy's Law. Hard, infectious hardcore with fun lyrics.

7 INCHES

By Ken Katkin

THE MISANTHROPE

"Why Do You Treat Me So Bad?" (Get Hip)

This EP attempts to disprove the old adage, "you can't judge a book (or record) by its cover." The EP sounds exactly the way it looks. If you're a fan of the Pebbles series, then you'll want this. It doesn't rock as punkily as the stuff on Back From The Grave and it's less pop than the Nuggets series, but it's got that classic garage sound of the Dirt Words, the Choir, and other great Pebbles bands. And it was recorded in 1988!

THE MARSHMALLOW OVERCOAT

"Suddenly Sunday"/"Tomorrow Never Knows" (Get Hip)

These Arizonans have spent some time bakin in the sun & listening to Doors records...which I guess is cool now that even the Feelies are doing Doors covers. The A side is a very pop original with a lot of Farfisa organ. The B side, a weak rendition of an oft-covered Beatles tune, doesn't need any additional exposure. Not recommended except to devote psych-heads.

PLEASURE HEADS

"Song For God"/"Clove Cigarettes" (Get Hip)

The A side is stubbornly catchy, if alarmingly insipid, pop. Not unlike a lot of late 70's "New Wave" acts like the B-52's. The B side is just plain insipid. Not recommended to anybody. (509 1st St., Canonsburg, PA 15317)

THE SULTREES

"Take Me As I Am"/"Contrails" (Cryptovision)

Vaguely generic 70's Rock on the A side, sorta like the Golden Palominos (whom I dislike). The B side is more of a 60's type thing; in fact, it's a surf instrumental with a lot of organ. It's kind of slow, though. After all, whoever heard of Surfin' Yorkies? Not recommended.

(PO Box 1812, New York, NY 10009)

CRUCIAL YOUTH

"Crucial Yule" EP (Faith/Caroline)

Crucial Youth are NJ/HC's greatest hopes. Each of their releases outshines its predecessor. "Crucial Yule," which may already be sold out, was a limited run of 1000 Christmas EP with two tunes, "Christmastime For The Skins," to the tune of Iron Cross' "Crucified For Your Sins," and a thoroughly massive Minor Threat-style cover of Jonathan Richman's "I'm Straight." Whether you love straightedge hardcore or hate it, all Crucial Youth records (including their readily available LP, "The Posi Machine") are Crucial. Very strongly recommended.

STRANGULATED BEATOFFS

"Shake Your Dick"/"Strangle Me" (Firefighter)

St. Louis' version of Pussy Galore, these guys were called Drunks With Guns & came and went without much fanfare, although their 7" records are starting to sell for a lot of money. Now chief Drunk and guitarist Stan Seitrich has a new combo: The Strangulated Beatoffs. The A side of their 7" debut sounds like an outtake from Drunks With Guns. It's in the same style (hateful noise) but it's not quite as good. The B side, a weird, folkie, non-noisy track, is most reminiscent of the Minutemen, and is a must-own. Recommended.

M.F.D.

"Chapter 3," 7" EP

DSI (Box 346, Dunn Loring, VA 22027)

5 songs, 1 live, all pretty basic with an upbeat tempo. The singer now & then reminds me of Steve from Marginal Man. "Last Leg" is the prime cut; then the live song. There's some bizarre element to the band - maybe some of the song titles or the artwork...

PLASTIC PATRICK & THE HICKOIDS

"Fun While It Lasted"/"Ragged But Right," 7"

Matako Mazuri (Box 4084, Austin, TX 78765)

The Hickoids recently came through the local venues and were alright. I'm not too much for "cowpunk," though. They've teamed up with someone named Plastic Patrick for this single. The A side is a good song, good guitar mixed with Patrick's voice, but the flip s what I expected this project would be like...a good ol' country anthem you might play in the morning while doin' the chores.

LOCO GRINGOS

"Nurture My Pig"/"Fruit Fly" 7"

Matako Mazuri

The A side is enough for someone to just sell this without even hearing the second side - poor vocals set to even poorer music. "I need a woman to nurture my pig..." only redeeming quality of the song is the senseless lyrics. The B side is something I could imagine Ricky Ricardo and the boys doing on Love Lucy after someone slipped LSD into their margaritas. It's a good song, but overall I think this would be a waste of money to buy.

M.D.C.

1981-1987, LP

Boner (Box 2081, Berkeley, CA 94720)

MDC (this time, "More Dead Cops") release a compilation of their singles. Besides the music, this record comes with a lyric sheet & 2 posters (one of the Boner Records ad for the lp, another full of information on world hunger, the Reagan administration, and other serious topics). Music is standard relentless hardcore, some standouts. Recommended to MDC fans that can't find their early 7 inchers, or anyone wanting to check out this band.

HAPPY GO LICKY

Live 12" EP

Peterbilt/Sammich (Box 32292, Washington, DC 20007)

Same lineup as Rites Of Spring, but this is a 180 degree turn from RoS. A harsh, damaging sound recorded live. Reminds me of a mix between Flipper and Fugazi (without Ian MacKaye). A creepy feeling goes through the body while listening to this. 6 songs, the last one is cut off sharp. Interesting packaging, too.

Tom Edison's Skate Report

SOUL SIDE

Trigger, LP

Dischord (3819 Beecher St. NW, Washington DC 20007)

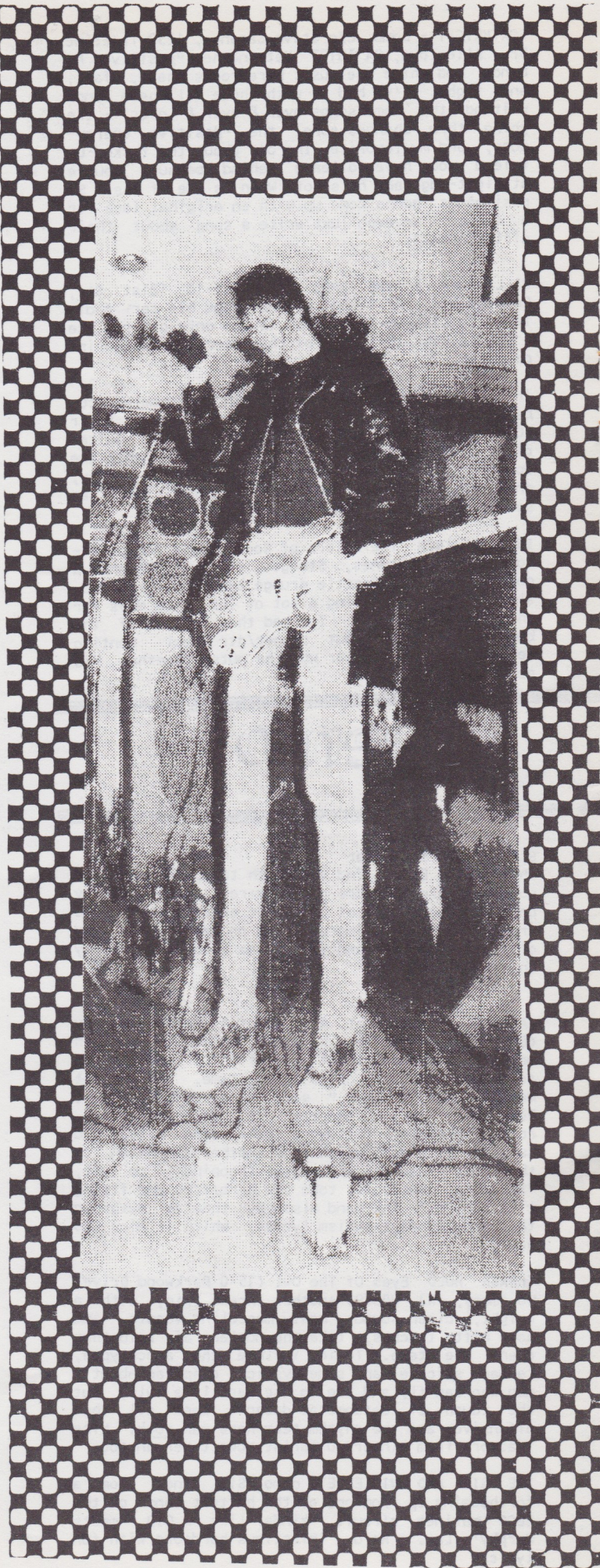
Their 2nd lp (now an "official" Dischord release) and it's totally kickass. Better production and musicianship really make this better than their first. Unique guitar riffs and Bobby's voice sounding different only strengthen my opinion that it's one of 88's BEST. From real rocking tunes to abrasive-type mellowness leaves you wanting more. But like the first lp, this still doesn't do them justice compared to their live shows.

BAD RELIGION

Suffer, LP

Epitaph (Box 7112, Burbank, CA 91505)

This is their first release in a couple of years, and it's worth it. Well put together, fast upbeat music put to Greg Graffin's outstanding voice. He's the only singer who makes words like pathos, bucolic, omnipotent, and anechoic nebula sound good. Greg Hetson from the Circle Jerks is one of the 2 guitarists who really adds spice and energy to the songs. 15 tunes in all, not



HEAVY METAL

Methedrine

METHEDRINE is a young speedmetal/thrash whatever band from New Jersey whose powerful first demo has set a lot of heads banging. We asked the boys a few questions.

Methedrine is Mike Heaton, bass; Jim Murray, vocals; Dan Hamilton, guitar; and Britt Nixon, drums.

Q: The songs on your demo have a really heavy sound, with a big bottom and sludgy tempos. I have to ask - has Metallica been a major influence?

Mike - None of us are really too into Metallica. We have a really wide variety of personal influences which come together to give us our sound. I'm into stuff like Embrace, Ugly Americans, and Samhain. The other guys listen to stuff like DRI and Cryptic Slaughter, to Nuclear Assault, Death Angel, and even rap like Public Enemy. We're all into totally different stuff but that's what gives us our own sound.

Britt - There's no special reason why the songs on our demo are long, sometimes they just work out that way. We have shorter, faster songs like "Porno Stars" and "You've Changed."

Q: Why doesn't everyone in the band introduce themselves.

Mike: I'm 18, I hate work, I don't need money, and I'm planning on becoming a professional bum.

Britt: I'm 18 too, I landscape with Jim, who's 19.

Dan: I'm 19, I work in a liquor store. When we're not at work or practice, we usually just hang out with each other.

Britt: The thing that bothers me about Mike is he's deaf. He never hears anything I say. Dan smokes too much!

Mike: Jim drives me crazy because he's so sexy. (Just kidding!) Jim is the world's most forgetful person, and Britt is just, well, Britt.

Q: Several of your songs come across as very anti-woman, depicting them all as either groupies or bad news.

Mike - It's not that we have a low opinion of women in general. I'm not that kind of person. I feel everyone's equal, no matter what color or sex. It's just that we're kind of down on sluts. That's what "The Hunger" is about. Those girls you see at all the mega-stud metal shows, with all the spandex and 3-foot high bleached blond hair. I don't see how any human being can be so cheap and degrade themselves like that.

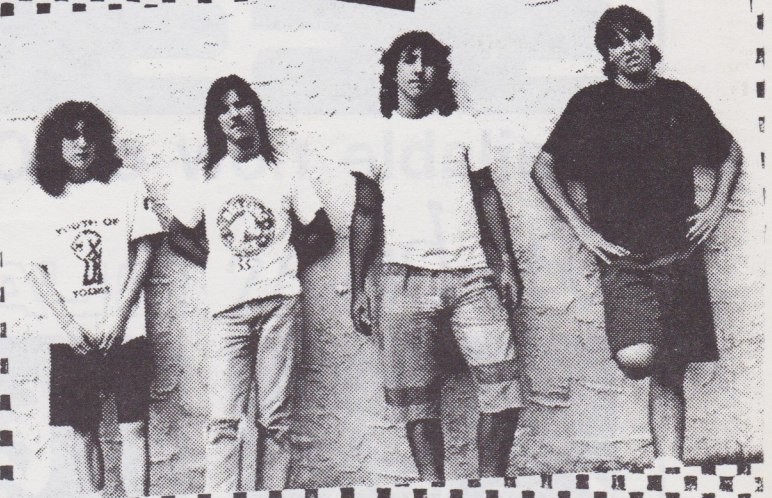
Q: How would you describe your music to someone who hasn't heard it yet?

Mike: I don't really like labels. I don't think they're fair, too limiting.

Britt: We're just us, Methedrine - fast, heavy, slow, everything rolled up into one.

Dan: Our music is energetic, and I like to see people respond to it in an energetic way. I like to see everybody having a good time.

"Meth Till Death" is available for \$3 and the band welcomes letters, to:
Methedrine, 1007 Vermont Ave. Scullville, NJ 08330.



INFECTIOUS DISORDER was formed in the summer of '87. All members of the band went to the same high school in East Brunswick, NJ, shared the same interest in music, and were friends. Chris Sheppard plays guitar and writes all of the music. Andy Wingler shares the lyric-writing and sings. His started singing when the band first got together. Chris Ehlbeck plays drums and his brother Rick plays bass. The average age is 18-19.

"Our main goal is to make the best music we possibly can, and gain a following so we can play clubs in NY and NJ," says Andy. The band is raising money now through the sale of t-shirts and demos to finance an album-length demo recording. "None of us really care to classify our music," says Andy. "We will not fit into just one category. Our sound is influenced by the early sounds of Jimi Hendrix and Black Sabbath, but we're also influenced by the power & energy of bands like Black Flag, Dead Kennedys, and Agnostic Front."

The band's first demo was recorded live in a chicken coop in rural Monroe, NJ, which serves as the band's rehearsal space.

For band info and merchandise, write Andy Wingler, 34 Windsor Dr., E. Brunswick, NJ 08816.

INFECTIOUS DISORDER



NEW FROM

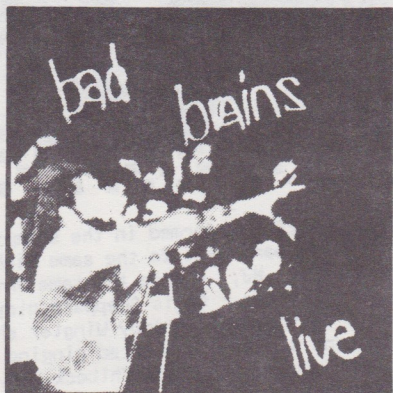
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bad brains

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Saint Vitus

DESCENDENTS

Dinosaur Jr.



Mournful Cries. This is their heaviest effort yet featuring the second guitar of vocalist Who for the first time. The masters of dirge metal take a another step forward with these six new epics, including the soon to be classic 'Bitter Truth'. SST 161 (CD \$13.00; LP/CA \$7.50)



Hall Raker (LIVE) - Just released by SST. SST 205 (CD \$13.00; LP/CA \$7.50)



Bug. Rising from the primeval world of the second millennia A.D., Bug, the second SST release for Dinosaur Jr., mercilessly subdues the unsuspecting planet. Experience the monstrous rock of 'Freak Scene' and 'Let It Ride' as J. Lou and Murph craft 9 songs of beauty and inhuman power. SST 216 (CD \$13.00; LP/CA \$7.50)

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BOOKS & VIDEO



MINOR THREAT LIVE Video - Dischord (3819 Beecher St. NW, Wash DC 20007)

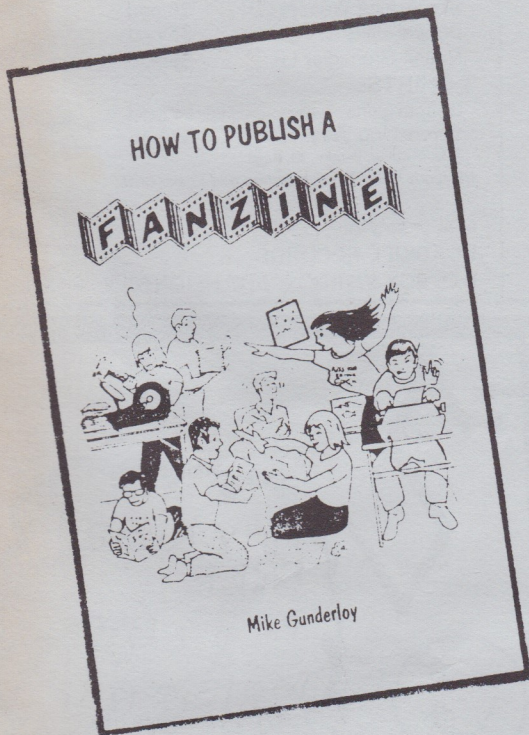
I will not feign objectivity here and just let you know that I was (and still am) a big Minor Threat fan. One advantage to being an old geezer is that you can brag to the young 'uns about being there when it mattered, and I saw Minor Threat a good dozen times, in venues as different as Irving Plaza in New York, and a junior high school lunchroom in suburban Virginia. This video, recorded in June, 1983, at the 9:30 Club in D.C., doesn't do a bad job of presenting a visual peek at the fathers of straightedge and the godhead of hardcore as they really were - four sweaty, talented young men in the most exciting rock n roll band of the early 1980's. Two cameras catch the action from both the back of the audience and the rear of the stage, giving you a decent view of both what it felt like watching band and what it all must have felt like to the band looking out at the slamdancing melee in front. The sound is first-rate (given the equipment they had and the clubs they played, the sound on this video is probably better than what most Minor Threat audiences got to hear way back when, actually). What you miss on the video, of course, is the pure inspired lunacy of the Pit; for any real Minor Threat addict, I recommend Flipside's Video Fanzine #2, which includes some truly frantic live footage from California and a hilarious skateboarding session with Ian and the guys. The Dischord video comes with a nice booklet of lyrics and photos for \$25.

HOW TO PUBLISH A FANZINE by Mike Gunderloy (Loompanics Press)

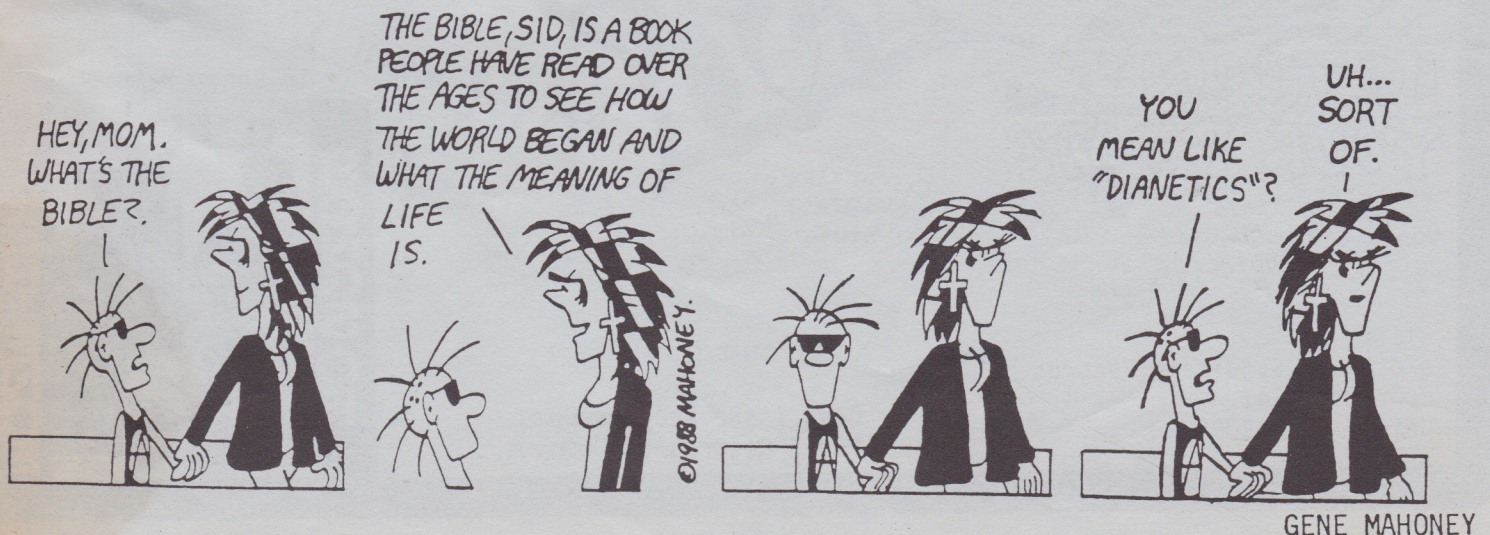
This book by Factsheet 5 editor Mike Gunderloy presents just about everything you'd need to know to start a fanzine, starting from the basics (finding a reason to do a fanzine, choosing a format and finding a printer) through some of the meatier problems you get to later on (the vagaries of the postal system, subscriptions, how to set your ad rates, and so on). It's all well-organized, easy to read, and a big help. Listen, I get about a letter a month from some kid someplace asking me for advice on the topic. From now on, they're just going to get a copy of this review and this advice - if you've never tried it before and want to give fanzining a go, buy this book. You can get it direct from the author for only \$6 (Mike Gunderloy, 6 Arizona Ave, Rensselaer, NY 12144).

STINKY FINGER - "The Last Show" Video; also, "Def & Dum" cassette

Imagine a couple of alienated white kids down in Johnson City, Tennessee, out to stir up some trouble and have a little fun. They start a punk rock band and give themselves funny names like Mr. Ugly and Johnny Puke, and 'cos it's the Eighties and they're with-it dudes, they make it a rap group, only they use live music behind their two-man raps. The band's songs are a bit like the Beastie Boys - funny, irreverent, usually full of foul-mouthed sexual references, and lots of bragadaccio - with titles like "My Penis," "Fag Basher," "Stinky Drinkin'," and my favorite, "Cocaine Whore" (pronounced "Cocaine Ho.") The band's last show was captured on video - one-camera set up so it's pretty static, but it gives you an idea of what they were like onstage. If you'd prefer to stick to audio, studio versions of their songs are available on the "Def & Dum" cassette lp, recommended by both me and Mykel Board, who think these guys are the funniest thing since G.G.Allin pissed on Cosloy. Video is \$20, tape is \$5 ppd, from Johnny Puke, 217 Clark St. #4, Bristol, VA 24201. Johnny also trades videos so if you're a trader, send him your list.



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